WHERE LIFE IS BETTER

AN UNSENTIMENTAL AMERICAN JOURNEY

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WHERE LIFE IS BETTER

AN UNSENTIMENTAL AMERICAN JOURNEY

Also by

JAMES RORTY

Our Master's Voice—Advertising

Children of the Sun

What Michael Said
to the
Census Taker

WHERE LIFE IS BETTER

AN UNSENTIMENTAL AMERICAN JOURNEY

BY JAMES RORTY

a JOHN DAY book

REYNAL & HITCHCOCK

NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

THE people who will most clearly perceive, but also, I hope, most generously forgive the limitations of this book are the people who helped me to write it. They are the dozens and scores of newspapermen, public officials, teachers, labor organizers, and miscellaneous casual acquaintances whom I met on a seven months' automobile trip, covering about fifteen thousand miles, across the continent and back.

To most of them I was almost or wholly unknown. When I told them that I would be able to spend four days, perhaps a week in that community, they shrugged. Mine was a fantastic enterprise. It would take at least four months, they assured me, to obtain an approximate understanding of that one community. After which they proceeded, with a generosity for which I cannot be too grateful, to give me much more of their time than they could afford; to give me the benefit of their own informed expertness which in most cases I must keep anonymous because they were often talking off the record. Newspapermen, especially, know infinitely more than they can print.

What these people will look for in this book and what I hope they will find is an attempt to isolate and describe significant phenomena and trends; an attempt to evoke and make understandable the tensions, the confusions, the "feel" of the country as a whole; to exhibit not so much

the statistics as the people whose current dilemmas the statistics fail adequately to express.

The point of view of the writer is frankly radical—curiously, the people I talked to did not seem to mind this particularly, not even Chamber of Commerce secretaries and business men. Much more than I had expected, I encountered all along the route an impressive residue of the earlier American hardihood which Thomas Jefferson expressed when he said that America would need a revolution at least every twenty years. These people were not afraid to contemplate radical change, nor even, many of them, to participate in the making of change. But all of them without exception were dismayed by the paradoxes of the American situation: our magnificently developed twentieth-century technical productivity and our nineteenth-century pioneer-trader economic and social concepts; the profit-motivated technological and financial adventurousness of our gambler-entrepreneurs and their economic and political conservatism, equally profit-motivated and enforced by an acute realization of the intolerable fragility of the productive-distributive apparatus; the obstinate hangover of the democratic dogma and illusion and the obvious facts of class stratification and class rule; the technical perfection of our instruments of social communication and their social misuse, disuse, and frustration.

Somewhere in one of the drought areas of northeastern Montana I wrote in one of my thirty notebooks: "The country is too big. It is too big to report, and partly because it is too big to report, it is, possibly, too big to govern."

Elsewhere I indicate another possibility: that the coun-

try is too small, that within the limits of our current social consciousness, the cure, or rather the palliative of our intolerable size will be still more size; in short, imperial conquest, as a means of temporarily resolving some of the contradictions above listed.

The factor of pace is also important of course; indeed it is probably determining. We have no time to mature and disseminate workable social and economic concepts; we have no time to patch and rehabilitate our dilapidated democratic institutions; we have no time to develop a revolutionary movement sufficiently powerful and responsible to take and hold power when and if the opportunity is given. It was this realization which most dismayed the more liberal and informed people to whom I talked.

I say that I was cordially received and generously treated. There were exceptions, of course; a misunderstanding with the Sheriff of Imperial County, California, which resulted in my spending a night in the county jail at El Centro; a theological difference with a preacher in Marked Tree, Arkansas, which occasioned my rather precipitate exit from that community. But in general I have much reason for gratitude and little for complaint.

In certain chapters I have resorted to the greater concreteness and enlarged perspective of the fictional and poetic forms, chiefly as a practical means of handling difficult material. I have tried to make these experiments reinforce rather than break the narrative and expository sequence, and to fuse the journalistic material into a rough synthesis.

Perhaps the title of this book requires a word of explanation. It is borrowed from a booklet I wrote ten

years ago for Californians, Inc., entitled "California, Where Life Is Better." The booklet was widely distributed—I am told that the successive editions totalled nearly a million copies. Although the writing of the booklet was a commercial assignment, it was written with a certain sincere enthusiasm. Life, I thought, *was* better in the California of that period in a number of respects. The climate was milder; the slums of the cities were less sordid; fresh vegetables and flowers were plentiful and cheap at all seasons of the year; the landscape of magnificent mountain ranges and great golden valleys was intoxicating to me then, and is still. Moreover, in that earlier time the social stratifications, despite the maturing racial and class conflicts, had not yet hardened and crystallized. In San Francisco, particularly, I had encountered and was grateful for a genuine spirit of tolerance and generosity which extended to all classes. The treasures of nature had not been wholly appropriated, so men and women could afford to be a little generous to one another.

In that "boost" pamphlet I could write with a good conscience many true words of praise. I could not and did not write all the truth, it being the nature of advertising to exhibit half-truths only, in the service of its special pleading for commercial causes.

In my chapters dealing with California, I have striven to be neither pessimistic nor unfair. But life is not better there now. When I left in 1924, after spending four years in San Francisco, I thought California soft, sentimental, naïvely brutal and greedy in its spirit of pioneer boosting and grabbing, but not vicious. I returned to find the mold hardened by conflict and fear. California was already

building the stockades of fascism with which to protect what was left of its grandiose acquisitive dream. But the same Rotarian rhetoric, the same advertising casuistry were still current, there as elsewhere, all across the continent. Business would "pick up." Life would be better just over some nearing horizon of space or time—not different, but "better." With few exceptions the hitch-hikers I picked up along the road shared this day dream equally with the secretaries of the local Chambers of Commerce, although in other respects they were less fortunate.

I encountered nothing in 15,000 miles of travel that disgusted and appalled me so much as this American addiction to makebelieve. Apparently, not even empty bellies can cure it. Of all the facts I dug up, none seemed so significant or so dangerous as the overwhelming fact of our lazy, irresponsible, adolescent inability to face the truth or tell it.

If we, as a people, are to go down helplessly in a fatuous and seemingly unnecessary chaos, it will be this where-life-is-better day dream that ensnared and tripped us. For the masses of the population life is not better here, there, or anywhere across the continent. Nor will it be really better tomorrow, despite the half-baked and contradictory indices of "recovery" which at this writing have given Mr. Roosevelt his longed-for "breathing-spell." Within the framework of the present social order there is no escape either in space or time for the great masses of American citizens. As for the New Deal ephemeræ I set out to chase, they are a part of the dream; the fervor of fake "reform" is almost an index of the disintegration of the system. The New Deal has cured nothing and worsened much.

It is hard for me to understand how any journalist, traveling across the continent with his eye on the facts, could bring back a different report. Yet I know that other reports will be rendered, contradicting mine, and bolstering optimism with evidence of a sort. The dream must be served.

Too late, I realise that in hoping to make any dent whatever upon this cloud bank of illusion, I open myself to the charge of being sentimental. So that mine was perhaps not an unsentimental journey after all. But let it pass. Time is not sentimental, and time hurries so fast. I am sure that time will correct soon enough both my own sentimentalities and those which I attack.

1

MERRY-GO-ROUND

HAWKS circle and soar over the middle-western and western plains today as in earlier days. They are the descendants of the hawks that watched the slow trek of the covered wagons fifty, a hundred years ago, and the human beings moving today over the only slightly altered landscape are, many of them, the descendants of the covered wagon and later pioneers. The hawks have not changed, the stare of their yellow eyes is anciently simple and predatory, their motions in the air are the same.

The human beings, too, have not changed biologically. But their motions and their means of motion have changed greatly. Whereas in the earlier time the prevailing motion was a slow, irresistible drift from east to west, now the movement is rapid, accelerative, and circular, almost centrifugal.

People in automobiles are racing over the highways: all kinds of people, going in every direction, for all kinds of reasons and for no reason at all. Traveling salesmen representing eastern factories, intent upon selling their goods in western towns which also have factories making similar goods, and which also send out salesmen traveling in the opposite direction. Government representatives solemnly concerned with seeing that factory A observes the same "fair practices" as factory B. Farmers moving east,

farmers moving west. City people moving to the country where there is more food; farmers who have lost their farms moving to the cities where there is more relief. Farmers planting grain; farmers plowing grain under. Dairymen trucking their milk to the cities; Farm Holiday posses racing their cars to head off the trucks and spill the milk on the highway. Corn-hog farmers breeding pigs; government crews slaughtering the pigs and the pregnant sows and piling the carcasses in ditches. (The hawks circle lower and are joined by vultures; this is indeed something new.) Organizers of all kinds course over the roads: New Deal organizers, Townsend Plan organizers, Share-the-Wealth organizers, Liberty League organizers, A. F. of L. organizers, Communist organizers; also thousands of unorganized men, women and children thumb the passing cars going east, west, north, and south, going nowhere in particular, for no particular reason. The wind rises, and suddenly all movement stops; the surface of the land rises, and clouds of dust darken the sun. The people cower in their automobiles; the roadside ditches are drifted level with the concrete; in cities many hundreds of miles away apartment dwellers shut their windows and brush the destroyed fertility of Kansas cornfields from their counterpanes. (The hawks soar higher with bleak cries; this too is something new—there were no such dust storms in the earlier time before the gang plows raped the buffalo sod.)

For seven months I drove an automobile over this landscape, and now I have to justify some fifteen thousand miles of travel. People ask me: What did you see? What did you learn? What is happening to America, and what is going to happen? I tend to balk at these questions. The

landscape is so huge; the forces so complex. How should I know, or venture to speak with much greater assurance than any other of those bewildered ants I passed on the road?

In Carmel, California, I talked to a poet who has traveled very little in recent years, but has thought a great deal. He doesn't know either, but he has had moments of profound intuition and prescience. In 1929 Jeffers published a poem entitled "The Broken Balance," from which the following is quoted:

The people buying and selling, consuming pleasures, talking in the archways,
Were all suddenly struck quiet
And ran from under stone to look up at the sky: so shrill and mournful,
So fierce and final, a brazen
Pealing of trumpets high up in the air, in the summer blue over Tuscany.
They marveled; the soothsayers answered:
"Although the Gods are little troubled toward men, at the end of each period
A sign is declared in heaven
Indicating new times, new customs, a changed people; the Romans Rule, and Etruria is finished;
A wise mariner will trim his sails to the wind."

I heard yesterday
So shrill and mournful a trumpet-blast,
It was hard to be wise. . . . You must eat change and endure; not be much troubled
For the people; they will have their happiness.

When the republic grows too heavy to endure, then Cæsar will carry it;
When life grows hateful, there's power.

Not having given my heart to the hawks, I cannot learn either to hate life or to love power, on the terms that power ordinarily exacts from her lovers. Once, I confess, in the middle of the Montana desert, I had a moment of sheer panic. I had a sudden impulse to move my family to some tropical island, relatively uncontaminated by civilization, and there spin out the residue of my biological span; an impulse to escape, to commit social suicide.

The impulse passed, as did similar impulses I remembered having had during the War and after the War; psychological strains and crises which were vaguely diagnosed as "shell-shock": the proper penalty which I paid, I remember one physician telling me, for not having believed in the War, for permitting myself to hate its unctuous irrationality, its idiotic sentimentalities and hatreds, its meaningless violence and cruelty.

But America was not at war. Why should I have experienced again the war *frisson?* People ask me what is going to happen to America and I reply: I don't know. But this I do know: that all over America I smelled the war smell, that on the clearest days I saw people moving in a mist of fear and hatred. . . .

In Louisiana I saw the man who, but for his assassination just as this book was going to press, might one day have become Jeffers' American Cæsar. He was full of fear and hatred; morally, an infantile monster, with extraor-

dinary abilities and a prodigious lust for power. I probed into his background and found the backwoods of northern Louisiana still reeking with the hatreds of generations of half-starved and rebellious hill-billies, dating from before the Civil War. Will Huey Long have comparable successors in Louisiana and elsewhere? I am convinced that he will.

Driving north through the Yazoo delta, I picked up a mulatto who was returning to the small farm he had inherited from his father. We passed through a trading village, and he said: "This is the town where my father was killed." I said: "Why was he killed?" He replied: "I don't know." I said: "Who killed him?" He replied: "I don't know." I stared at the yellow mask beside me. "You know," I said. "You don't need to be afraid to tell me."

He peered at me cautiously. "My father," he said, "was well-to-do. He owned three hundred acres of land. He had money in the bank. He had twenty-one children and sent half of them to college."

I said: "Was that why he was killed?" "I think so," he replied. "Do you know who killed him?" I asked. He looked at me and was silent. "Was the man who killed him ever caught, tried, and convicted?" "No." "How do you feel about that?" He edged away from me suspiciously, and for twenty miles sat silent while we drove across the endless checkerboard of the cotton fields, the men and mules plowing, the women and children either fishing along the roadside ditches or sitting on the porches of their two- and three-room unpainted shacks—mill village shacks or worse, set down at regular intervals among the fields, without a tree or a shrub to palliate their ugliness.

"In that town over there," my companion broke the silence, "they shot a preacher a while back." "A Negro preacher?" "Yes." "Was he organizing share-croppers?" He looked at me. "The plantation owner said: 'The nigger is my shade in summer and my fire in winter.' " "They're not all like that." "No." "Did you go to college?" "Yes." "The share-croppers need leaders, don't they?" "I've got my mother, my wife and two babies. We can just get by."

Soon after that he got out at a cross-roads. I didn't ask his name. I am sure he wouldn't have given it to me. . . .

In Marked Tree, Arkansas, I talked to a white preacher, pastor of the leading Protestant church of the community. I asked him about the charges of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union that twenty-three acts of violence had been committed by planters, riding bosses and deputy sheriffs against white and black members of the union. I intimated that, as an exponent of the Christian way of life, he must be concerned about outbreaks of violence among his parishioners. He glared at me. He said that he knew of no acts of violence. I offered evidence, and he qualified this. There was no trouble now. But if any more newspapermen from the North stuck their noses into Poinsett County, there would be trouble. I resented the implied threat and he became more specific. If I wanted trouble right now, I could have it.

I drove out of Marked Tree with the glare of a medieval inquisitor boring into my back. It might have been the muzzle of a shot-gun. If I had stayed to argue, however gently, I think it would have been. . . .

In the jail at El Centro, California, the same sort of

eyes stared at me through a peep-hole cut in a partition —the eyes of Imperial County's version of "law and order," in the heads of an assortment of plain-clothes detectives and stool pigeons, for whose benefit I was put through the "show-up." A few hours before I had seen some of the rat faces that went with those rat-eyes, when a dozen deputy sheriffs and stool pigeons questioned me and searched me and my car for evidence that I, a reporter with full credentials from capitalist newspapers including an identification photograph, was engaged in "communistic activities." They were not pleasant faces. Those of the petty offenders lodged in my jail block were better, finer, gentler; even the pale, curiously aristocratic face of the border gambler—he had once been a railroad switchman—who twice intervened to quiet the nerves of quarreling prisoners. When I suggested that his trade was merely taking money from suckers who could spare it, he said firmly: "Any kind of sucker. If a sucker can be taken, I take him. . . ."

The thread of violence runs through all these episodes: the violence of owners, of bosses, under the camouflage of "law and order"; the violence of planters using the church as its tool, race prejudice as its smoke screen.

How can I, who remember so well the violence, the irrationality, the coördinate and collusive sentimentality of the War, put my trust in this violence or any of its agents? I don't. Not even in the class struggle, conceived of as an inevitable process issuing ultimately in freedom, justice, the coöperative commonwealth, the classless society. The class struggle is not beyond good and evil any more than

is any other kind of struggle. And the final conflict, if there is to be a final conflict, which I doubt, will be not between class and class, but between intelligence and stupidity, between sanity and fanaticism, between justice and injustice, between freedom and tyranny.

The above reflection, copied from one of my notebooks, indicates the extent to which the trip shattered some of my initial assurances and intensified my doubts. A landscape, I learned, is always bigger than it looks on the map; and the destiny of America, I came to suspect, is more complex and less certain than it looks in the official Communist blue-prints. Americans have always been a violent people: physically and emotionally violent and mentally soft and lazy. If the pioneers were brutal and sentimental enough in all conscience when they had plenty of Indians to rob and kill, forests to devastate, and soil to maltreat, will they not be twice as brutal, twice as sentimental, now that the Indians are on reservations, the forests turned into pulp magazines, and soil eroded by water and wind, so that they have only each other on whom to wreak their hairy-chested stupidities? What will happen now that the last frontier is closed, now that cable conveyors drop concrete into the streams where only the beavers built dams fifty years ago, now that the trapper who conquered the wilderness so violently is himself trapped in a new strange wilderness which he does not understand, even though it was he who created it?

Physically and emotionally violent, mentally soft and lazy. It seemed to me that five years of depression have had made this characterization of the American temperament little less accurate.

One of the questions I am asked is: What percentage of the American population has grasped the central dilemma of our time and country, namely, the failure of the capitalist mode of production for profit to finance consumption or to make possible a world at peace?

I asked the same question myself all across the continent and back, and many of the people I interviewed were in a position to estimate their own regions at least. By collating their guesses with my own observations I arrived at a rough estimate: that ninety-five out of a hundred Americans have not grasped this dilemma, whether stated in Marxian, technocratic, Utopian, Epic, coöperative, or any other terms. In other words, not more than 5 per cent of the population have begun to think at all, and these belong to a special category of liberal and radical sophistication. They are class-conscious or at least politically and socially conscious workers, teachers, preachers, labor organizers, doctors, social workers, writers, artists, labor lawyers, a few architects, engineers, technicians, and a very few business men.

Another question that my liberal friends asked me on my return was: "Are not businessmen generally beginning to grasp this central dilemma?" On the contrary, it struck me that businessmen as a whole are no more informed and considerably less liberal than they were during the New Era. Take San Francisco after the ordeal of the general strike. Having once lived there, I had many liberal friends and acquaintances in business and in close touch with business leaders. I asked them: "How many San Francisco business leaders know what has happened to the country and why?" There were various estimates. The

highest was six. "You see," explained the shrewdest of my informants, "so many of them are only a few jumps ahead of the sheriff. They have to keep their noses close to their own ledgers; they have technological changes to worry about, tariff worries, code worries, labor worries. It is true that even to run their own businesses efficiently they really ought to read a little Marx. But today they have less and less time to read anything. They work harder, fight harder, and less and less intelligently."

More and more, I noted, business is turning to ex-teachers and ex-newspapermen for counsel and guidance which, incidentally, they rarely follow, this being the historic experience of courtiers and philosophers-in-waiting. I had dinner with one of these, who had perforce played a rather uncomfortable and unedifying rôle in the general strike. Months afterward his conscience still troubled him and he had taken refuge in history and philosophy. In lieu of answering some of my questions, he showed me the following quotation from Guglielmo Ferrero's *The Women of the Cæsars:*

For few episodes in general history impress so powerfully upon the mind the fact that the progress of the world is one of the most tragic of its phenomena. Especially is such knowledge necessary to the favored generations of prosperous and easy times. He who has not lived in those years when the old world is disappearing and the new one making its way cannot realize the tragedy of life, for at such times the old is still sufficiently strong to resist the assaults of the new and the latter, though growing, is not yet strong enough to annihilate that world on the ruins of which alone it will be able to prosper. Men are then called upon to solve insoluble problems and

to attempt enterprises which are both necessary and impossible. There is confusion everywhere in the mind within and in the world without. Hate often separates those who ought to aid one another since they are tending toward the same goal, and sympathy binds men together who are forced to do battle with one another.

I too was impressed for the moment by the penetration of Ferrero's thought, and recalled that Bernard Shaw had once dramatized this situation in *Saint Joan*. But remembering the rôle of the Pacific coast press in breaking the general strike and promoting the red-hunting sequel, it was with difficulty that I resisted the temptation also to quote a fragment of Lewis Carroll:

"I like the walrus best," said Alice, "because you see he was a *little* sorry for the oysters."

"He ate more than the carpenter, though," said Tweedledee. "You see, he held his handkerchief in front so that the carpenter couldn't count how many he took. Contrariwise."

"Did you see farmers?" they asked. I saw and talked to hundreds of farmers of all kinds, and the significant fact about them of course is that they *are* of all kinds. Is a plantation owner—he is frequently a corporation—a farmer? Is a share-cropper a farmer? Is a Mexican stoop laborer or American fruit tramp employed in the industrialized agriculture of the Imperial Valley a farmer? Is the American Fruit Company a farmer? Some of the middle-western farmers organized in the Farmers Union and Farm Holiday Association are beginning to think, but not in terms of Russian communism. Why should they? They are

property owners, business men, small capitalists—broke, desperate, but still capitalists.

And what about planning? Certainly the operations of the New Deal have given vast currency to the *concept* of planning. They have also served to obscure and in many respects to aggravate the dilemma which planning is supposed to solve. Here and there I ran into people involved in the work of the state planning commissions whose reports were turned in to the National Resources Board. They seemed to be of two sorts: regional boosters with an axe to grind and liberal dilettantes. I did meet one man who was neither. He was a distinguished man of science with a confirmed habit of using exact definitions, and he seemed to feel that the President had used the word "planning" either brashly or inexactly. If the latter, he wasn't interested. It was obviously impossible to plan fragments of a closely integrated national economy and then collate these fragments into anything remotely resembling a genuine plan. Moreover, such a genuine plan could only be constructed on the basis of complete socialization of both land and industrial resources and strict government control of foreign trade. Probably the President didn't really mean planning. Because if he did, he would shortly find himself in the position of the respectable gentleman who dined too well one evening and on his way home deliberately broke a plate glass window. When he was arraigned in court the next morning the judge said: "George, you're a man greatly esteemed in this community. Why did you break that plate glass window?" George thought a moment and replied: "Judge, I'm sorry, but this morning I can't

precisely tell you. However, last night I must have had some kind of a big idea."

The New Deal, I discovered, had already grown its crop of anecdotes, and many of them bore a striking resemblance to those nurtured in the soil of the German, Italian and Russian dictatorships. Some of them seemed to have been freshly coined in Washington, but they had reached the periphery with airplane speed; the ones I heard in Chicago had reached Minneapolis intellectuals ahead of me. Incidentally, one of the chastening and salutary things a traveler out of New York learns is that the brains of the country are not concentrated on the narrow island of Manhattan. On the contrary I came to suspect that the middle-western, southern and western intellectuals, to use a vulgarized but still useful word, are healthier and more in touch with American realities than either Columbia University or Union Square.

But these intellectuals constitute only a microscopic fraction of the 5 per cent of the population who are at all conscious, politically and socially. And the fact that they are thinking is probably less important than the fact that the 95 per cent are not thinking, have little access to the materials of thought—indeed are not even acting, not even achieving the simple response to pressures that was feared by conservatives and hoped for by radicals. What about the ten million unemployed, the twenty million on relief?

The more I saw of them, in the cities, in the relief bureaus, in the transient shelters, on the road, the more I was depressed and outraged both by their physical and

spiritual wretchedness and by their passive acceptance of their condition. In the end I came to feel that the failure of the unemployed to demand and secure relief or employment sufficient to maintain a decent living standard is the most serious, the most crucial of all our failures as a people. I am not alone in that feeling. I found it shared by labor organizers everywhere—even by relief directors.

In an article entitled "The Road to Destitution" in *Harper's Magazine,* G. Hartley Grattan says: "It is not a tribute to the American people that they have 'taken it' without protest; it is rather a distressing symptom of the disintegration of spirit which has been the inevitable accompaniment of widespread destitution. As more and more people have been engulfed by it, we should, had not all the revolt been beaten out of them in fending off this unwanted and unwonted end, have had demonstrations and protests galore. It is a bad sign that we have not. The relief population is not to be described as a patient group of patriotic Americans who would not think of storming the citadels, but as a collection of dispirited, beaten, exhausted individuals who have been racked to pieces on the road to destitution and who, now that they have arrived at the end of it, take what respite the relief grant offers and say nothing."

My notebooks fully document this analysis. In Toledo, for example, the unemployed call the Transient Shelter "Farewell House," in grim recognition of the fact that these refuges for the un-familied, the wandering, the destitute, are in effect factories for the making not merely of unemployables, but of a *lumpenproletariat* of abject, physically and morally disintegrated human beings. The

unemployed leaders confess that it is almost impossible to organize them—they are too far gone. Their rôle in a revolutionary crisis would almost undoubtedly be that of an anarchic, ferocious, looting mob.

Wherever I went, I found that the morale of the unemployed was low or high depending upon how soon the unemployed organizations had got started, and how militantly they had been led. If early in the depression there had been enough organized, disciplined, and directed protest, the relief scale was relatively high, and the unemployed had become unemployable to a much smaller degree. In these relatively well-organized areas, as for example Toledo, the unemployed, instead of being labor pariahs and scabs, were likely to play militant rôles in the strikes of their employed brothers. The philosophy of the unemployed leaders was expressed in the slogan: "Catch 'em early and teach 'em how to get tough." As Mr. Grattan's observations indicate, the weakness of the American radical movement has been such that it hasn't been able to catch enough of them early enough and teach them to get tough enough. Here again we are confronted with the paradox of violence. It is inevitable, even socially necessary and expedient.

Interestingly enough, I found that a good many relief directors recognized this. In a western city an unemployed worker came to the relief office to protest a relief cut. The relief director went through the routine explanation of how impossible it was to give the unemployed enough to live on. Then the man said: "I'm sick of this. I'm going to smash that window." The face of the relief director lighted. "Fine. But don't hurt yourself. Better wrap this

handkerchief around your hand." He did smash the window and he did hurt his hand. But when the police came, called by a frightened stenographer, the relief client had vanished, his hand carefully bandaged by the more sophisticated members of the staff, who were now in a position to report to their superiors convincing evidence that the relief scale must be increased.

This relief director, like an increasing number of the social workers who are operating the relief apparatus, knows all the questions and problems which I have sketched. He is one of the 5 per cent who know the questions but are by no means in agreement as to the answers.

The 95 per cent don't even know the questions. They don't think; the press, the radio, the movies do not give them the materials of thought, but instead give them obsolete stereotypes. But they feel, and despite their present passivity they will respond to pressures; ultimately they will act. How will they act? It seems to me that they will take the easiest way out; not the best way, but the easiest way, a way which requires neither knowledge of the questions, nor answering the questions in either thought or action. It is the way of their ancestors, the barbarian way, the "American" way, the logical extension into the international arena of the interrupted sweep of pioneer conquest. It dodges all the domestic issues, of democracy versus dictatorship, of "freedom" versus security; it finances consumption and solves unemployment; it merges all the fears into a single fear, all the hatreds into a single hatred. It is the way of war; war in the Pacific; war with Japan, probably, as Nathaniel Peffer has predicted, in

alliance with Great Britain; a trade war, designed to break Japan's grip upon the Chinese market, and so release the intolerable pressures of American capitalist overproduction and under-consumption.

The 95 per cent don't know the questions. But they know the answer, know it in their bones. "I guess things won't get any better until we have another war." How many times did I hear that all across the continent and back! Mechanics looking for work, fruit tramps, the unemployed in the cities, the farmers stranded in the drought areas, small business men—they all had that answer. Where had they got it? The war propaganda is not yet overt, even in the Hearst press. These people, the 95 per cent, were untouched by socialist, communist, or pacifist education. But they knew the answer. Not that they were for it, particularly. They were merely resigned. Being unable to think through or act through any program for the solution of the domestic dilemma in its own intransigently difficult terms, they regarded not without hope the prospect of being relieved of the burden of all thought, all responsibility. A war would solve it, they felt, even though some of them perceived vaguely that a war would only postpone and deepen the ultimate disaster.

They are admirable material for "voluntary conscription," this 95 per cent; admirable material for "democratic fascism," or whatever other name will be devised for it.

Last spring the hawks that hover over Wisconsin and Michigan saw another straight-line pioneer trek: the 200 farm families headed for the Matanuska Valley in Alaska, where the government is establishing a colony. At about

the same time the Pacific gulls were witnessing the mass flight of naval planes to Hawaii and the elaborate and costly war game of the navy, played around Wake Island, obviously with Japan as the hypothetical enemy. Possibly the two events were not without some connection, since Alaska would be the logical military and naval base for a war in the Pacific.

Is it possible that before long the hawks may see that milling movement of men in automobiles, which I have described, straighten out into marching lines, military convoys, a new surge of conquest destined this time to hurdle the ocean barrier and hurl itself upon the Asiatic mainland? It seems at once incredible and more probable than any other dénouement I have been able to imagine for the current American tragedy. It will answer none of the questions and solve none of the problems. It will almost certainly precipitate another domestic merry-go-round, concerning which only two things can be predicted: it will be violent, and it will not be merry.

2

STARTING WEST FROM EASTON

WHEN I told my neighbor, Odd Mark Wheeler, that I intended to spend the next seven months on the road in an automobile, trying to find out what was happening to the country at large and, in particular, chasing New Deal butterflies, he remarked:

"Well, I suspect you'd do a lot better by settin' right to home in Easton."

Now that I am back, Odd Mark's observation still worries me. It doesn't seem so odd as when I first heard it. What he had in mind, I think, was that my home township is in many respects a representative microcosm of America; that, in a way, my trip was an attempt to substitute physical motion for motions of the mind which might be expended more profitably at home.

Odd Mark has sat still or, rather, cultivated his acres for seventy years on top of a hill in southern Connecticut. He has never been to New York. He did not choose to visit New York. Yet Odd Mark is neither poor nor stupid. Indeed, I have so much respect for his weathered sapience that I am led to compromise with him; to sketch this southern Connecticut microcosm as a point of departure for my continental chase of New Deal ephemera.

I live on Crow Hill, which is in the township of Easton, Connecticut, about sixty miles from New York. In recent

years Easton has become one of the outlying suburbs of Bridgeport. It and the adjoining township of Weston were settled in 1750 or thereabout. Easton is east of Norwalk and Weston is west of Easton. In the horse-and-buggy days perhaps that meant something. Originally Weston included Easton, but the intervening ridge made communication difficult, so they split. Today they are joined by paved automobile roads, and their political and administrative separation is as archaic and cumbersome as the ancient sleighs and buckboards that still clutter the barns of some of my neighbors.

In the earlier years of my residence, when I sighted a forest fire on the ridge north of me, I was never quite sure whether to call the Easton fire warden or the Weston fire warden. Not that it made much difference. Experience showed that if I called the superintendent of the water company which owns much of the land in the Saugatuck and Aspectuck Valleys and serves a half dozen towns along the Sound, their employees would get there first and put out the fire, regardless of the jurisdictional privileges or responsibilities involved. Not, I add hastily, that Easton doesn't have a good volunteer fire department; indeed, we have a new truck and the fire laddies, "at jeopardy of life and limb" to use the phrase of a former fire chief in a town meeting address, are enthusiastic about going to fires. But in the matter of protecting my own wood lot, I soon learned to take advantage of "enlightened self-interest." The corporate, absentee owner of the water company, whoever that multiple personality may be, is by and large the duke of my township; the water company's orchards, its nurseries, represent the most substantial agricultural

investment; its protected reservoirs and streams are strictly private property; its power of condemnation is something for realtors and home-seekers to keep in mind.

History is written in faint but still legible traces all over my township. The pre-revolutionary turnpike between Greens Farms and Danbury crosses the ridge within a few hundred yards of my house. The redcoats traveled this pike when, in 1777, the British troops under General Tryon landed at Greens Farms and marched north to burn the stores of the revolutionary army at Danbury; doubtless the ancestors of the Merwins, the Freeborns, the Sherwoods—good Connecticut Yankee names you find on many a rural mail box—took pot shots at them from behind the stone walls which still mark the route of the ancient turnpike. It is a wood trail now, although it has never been legally closed. Fifty years ago, when houses still stood on the now crumbling rock foundations, it was known as "Nigger Lane." In the years preceding the Negroes had replaced the more adventurous Connecticut Yankees who had gone north into the more fertile valleys of Vermont, west along the Mohawk to the "Holland Purchase" in western New York, west into the fat lands of Ohio, still west into Iowa, Nebraska, across the Rockies along the Oregon trail, always west. Some of my own ancestors—Churchills, Adamses, Cogswells—followed that route; a few of them went even farther. They became missionaries and carried the moral certitudes of Methodism all the way up the Yangtze River.

The Negroes gave up and left for parts unknown long before I came to Crow Hill, although the clutch of ivy and dogwood on the dry-laid walls has not yet wholly

obliterated the evidences of this comparatively recent human occupation. Only a month ago, poking through the underbrush for lady slippers, I came upon another old well.

I have often wondered why the original pioneers insisted upon trying to farm Crow Hill. It was just at this point that the glacier, which once slid all the way into Long Island Sound, dropped its Gargantuan apron and deposited a prodigious tonnage of rocks. They were there in 1750, and they are still there, some of them piled in walls five feet high and six feet wide surrounding two acre lots, but most of them still in the fields, as I learn to my sorrow every spring when I try to make a garden. It is even worse north of me in the region known locally as "The Devil's Den," a five-mile stretch of rocky hills and gulches, covered with a mangy growth of birch and scrub oak, and burned over so often that even the wild flowers of the region have become discouraged. A much overgrown relic of the ancient pike traverses this region; part of it was cleared a couple of years ago by the Fairfield County Hunt Club for purposes of fox hunting. But last year the millionaire who owns most of Crow Hill employed a fox hunter who trapped over thirty foxes. It seems the foxes ate the solemn, mandarin-like pheasants which he imported to stock his private shooting preserve. Ultimately, I suppose Crow Hill will be populated only by the millionaire, his pheasants, and a few rattlesnakes that still lurk in the rocks of the northern hills.

The contemplation of this prospect, I reflect, will probably make old Charlie Babcock climb out of his grave again. Old Charlie once inhabited the house I bought

when I first came to Crow Hill. I got to know him well, for I held animated conversation with his ghost for a period of nearly three years. Legend has it that Charlie, being a dour, hard-working man, consumed by a hatred of the rocks the glacier had dumped on Crow Hill, used to stay up late and lay wall by moonlight. In the end he lost his mind and spent the last years of his life in a narrow room, cared for by two maiden daughters who died only a few years ago. In his demented state he would rise at four in the morning, tramp the oak boards of his prison and go through the customary routine of his day. "Gee! Haw!" he would shout. "God's curse on these stones!" I learned these and other facts about the ordeal of Charlie Babcock when, after increasing evidence that my wife and I were not alone in the house, I went to old residents of the neighborhood and sought explanations. Charlie's chair-tipping and other more or less conventional ghost performances had become pretty annoying and I decided to do something about it. So the next time he appeared, not so much as a physical presence, but as a tension, an urgency that made it impossible for me or my wife to work or even to talk to each other, I spoke to him, directly and sympathetically, asking what troubled him, what moved him to revisit, almost every time the moon was full, the scene of his unhappy earthly struggle.

I never got a complete sentence in reply; a few obscure phrases only, and these possibly suggested by my own stimulated imagination: "No cattle? That south field . . . cut it like cheese." What annoyed Charlie, as far as I could make out, was that the land he had given his life to make arable was growing up to blueberries and cedars;

that the house was occupied not by farmers, but by writers who did little else but read and write—our unkempt kitchen garden could scarcely be called farming.

I explained our situation to Charlie as best I could. But I had to keep on explaining for nearly three years—it was the only way I could keep him quiet. Some of the old people in the region believed me when I told them what was going on. But none of my friends did. They made silly remarks about my being half-Irish, after all. To which I replied that my wife was not Irish, but German, and Westphalian at that. Moreover, it was she who had witnessed Charlie's last appearance but one.

One brilliant October night she was reading before the fire when the clock fell off the mantel and Charlie ran around the corner of the fireplace. My wife saw him clearly on that occasion. She says he was only about six inches high and impressed her as being very sad. His midget embodiment still puzzles me, but I give my wife's explanation for what it may be worth: she believes that our protracted metaphysical arguments had shrunk him.

A few nights later a whippoorwill perched outside my window and chanted steadily for over an hour. At last, suspecting who it was, I threw open the window and denounced him roundly for a bore and a nuisance. He went away, and believe it or not, no whippoorwill has ever come near the house since.

We are in a new house now and I haven't seen Charlie in years. But I remember other griefs that he confided to me in those moonlight interviews, especially his chronic objection to "furriners." In Charlie's opinion the mil-

lionaire and his supercilious Chinese pheasants were just as foreign and just as objectionable as the Poles, Lithuanians, and Hungarians who, following the armistice and the deflation of Bridgeport's munitions industries, had gone back into the country and rehabilitated many of the abandoned farms. Charlie's feeling in this matter is shared by many of the surviving old-timers, including Odd Mark Wheeler. This feeling becomes acute with respect to certain urban émigrés like Old Man Hutchinson, a Wall Street operator who bought a farm in the region the year after the stock market crash. In that year he spent $30,000 and transformed a beautiful natural landscape into a meaningless replica of hundreds of other small country estates in Westchester and Long Island. Old Man Hutchinson had retired, he declared. The game was up and he had dug himself into the country to wait for the revolution. (It is rumored that his cellar is an arsenal of machine guns, ammunition, and canned goods, but I cannot vouch for that.)

Old Man Hutchinson is something of a rarity, although not altogether unique. The farmers in my region have cheerfully used the panic of these refugees to peg real estate values. But they do not respect them. Hutchinson, as Odd Mark has explained to me, is one reason why he has successfully resisted the temptation to visit New York.

"He don't know nothing," says Odd Mark. "He don't even know how he made his money or why he's losing it now. He can't set still. He's on the road day and night in that big go-devil of his. I expect Bill Myers will have a wrecking job out of him almost any day now. He ain't happy, and why should he be? He run out of Wall Street

like a youngster that's set fire to a haystack. Only he ain't a youngster. He's a pot-bellied old fool, and if he don't pay for the wood I drawed for him, I'll put the law on him."

The other "furriners"—the first and second generation of the Central European immigrant stock—are viewed with a suspicion which is suspended with respect to particular individuals who have successfully "Americanized" themselves; that is to say, who have more or less solved the problem of getting abreast, or even a little ahead of the native Joneses. The most successful contractor-realtor in the town is a Pole. The leading storekeeper is a German. Both of these prominent citizens stand with their fellow-foreigners with respect to political issues, within the limits of reason and practicality. These limits were reached a couple of years ago when the dominant Republican Party split, resulting in the election, for one of the very few times in history, of a Democratic first Selectman. The Socialists were also in the field with a ticket headed by the German storekeeper, the major plank of their local platform having to do with alleged discrimination against the back-country "furriners" in the matter of tax assessments. The Democrats elected a local magician—literally, a legerdemain artist—who quarreled loudly with the Republican town clerk, attempted vainly to put over some grandiose ideas of reform, and at the end of his term departed from the community. The Socialists, despite the support given by Jasper MacLevy the Socialist mayor of Bridgeport and his lieutenants, also faded. Economic determinism did it. The native Yankees stopped trading with the Socialist storekeeper until he was obliged to withdraw from politics.

We are again safely Republican in Easton and things are much as they were when I first came to the community, except that roads and schools have improved and the town meetings are perhaps a little less hilarious than formerly. Not much, however, because this hilarity is a community asset, a kind of substitute for a folk theater. At first I kept a straight face at these meetings, not wishing to appear supercilious or "uppity." But shortly I noticed that our most respected citizens felt no such obligation. When a belligerent ancient shook his fist at the town clerk and shouted: "What about that $16.33 that was never accounted for in 1925!" everybody laughed jovially. In time I came to suspect that some of these acts were planted for purposes of pure theater. Underneath there are serious conflicts, of course, the chief ones having to do with the growing pressure of the immigrant sector of the population for a greater voice in the town's affairs. But the convention of public business in Easton is the convention of the theater; any breach of this convention is regarded as bad form, and the offender as a spoil-sport.

Moreover, you have to be pretty much of an insider before you know how to vote. At some of the town meetings my wife and I were completely mystified and voted yes and no, believing it to be safer to let nature take its course. You could never tell. What seemed like graft might be a disguised form of unemployed relief. The eloquent tribune of the people might be interested in some contract. How could we know? It was almost impossible to disentangle the realities from the dramatic make-believe.

Easton is both inside and outside of the main stream of the economic and political crisis. It is outside to the degree

that it is enjoying a fortuitous eddy of expansion. Undoubtedly the chief industry of the town is the selling of old farm houses and farm land to city people. Easton has grown even during the depression and the prices of real estate, which slumped in 1931 and 1932, have come back almost to the pre-depression level. The number of New York commuters is increasing. Fantastic as it sounds, they spend as much as four hours in traveling to and from work, and some of them do this winter and summer.

But the Easton farmers also make milk and grow more truck than they can sell on the roadside stands; also many of the sons and daughters of immigrants and natives alike work in Bridgeport, which for years has been an open shop town, with the employers' blacklist used effectively to abort recurrent attempts at unionization. For a while Bridgeport was a sordid paradise for the sweatshop operators who fled into Connecticut to escape the clutches of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. The New Deal helped this a little temporarily and the state labor department put some of these racketeers out of business, but by no means all of them. The farm girls are still glad to get off the farm for a while, even at weekly wages of as little as four and five dollars. The extremes reached by this exploitation and difficulty of abating it are indicated by a headline in the *Bridgeport Herald*: "Court refuses to back up labor department in Monroe sweatshop case." One of the state's witnesses in this case was a Bridgeport girl who said she worked in the shop at Monroe, a village about ten miles north of Bridgeport, for three weeks, from 4.30 in the afternoon until 9 or 10 o'clock at night, and received only 75 cents for her work. According to the

Bridgeport Herald, "the state labor department waited for an entire year in its efforts to secure a conviction against two sweatshop bosses charged with 16 separate counts of violations of labor laws, only to see the criminal superior court in Bridgeport dismiss the charges against one man and fine the other $25 and costs." The newspaper account does not attempt to portray the social and economic situation of the women and girls who are obliged to seek work on such terms. Obviously it must be desperate. But other newspaper stories offer a clue to this desperation and its entailed social consequences. A while back a Bridgeport girl was arraigned in police court charged with street-walking. The *Herald* reports the case as follows: " 'What do they call you?' asked the desk sergeant of Angelina. 'Angel,' replied the lass with becoming modesty, and the sergeant went in the back room and talked to himself for half an hour, after which he took an aspirin and reported off duty." The moral back of the grim levity of this story, of course, is that Angelina should have worked three weeks for 75 cents and remained a good girl.

But one does not have to go to Bridgeport to encounter desperation. The working farmers of Easton and the surrounding region know it too. Last winter a friend of mine talked to his milkman, who had once been a prosperous salesman. The depression had obliged him to convert what had been his hobby, the raising of fancy dairy cattle, into a means of livelihood. He got up at five o'clock in the morning to peddle the product of his pure-bred Jerseys and Guernseys. Sometimes his truck skidded into the ditch. My friend suggested that he wind old rope around his

rear tires. The milkman replied: "Do you know what I'd do if I had that much good rope? I'd—" and his hands described the hangman's gesture.

There is no industry in Easton—unless, before this is printed, some garment trade racketeer moves a truck load of machinery into an empty barn—and we imagine, a little fatuously perhaps, that we are little affected by these peripheral industrial disturbances. Our industries died many years ago; many of the mill dams fell into the streams and the water company acquired the stream rights.

One of the last industries to die was the saw mill and forge that drew power from the Saugatuck at Valley Forge, only a mile or two below me. The forge originally used charcoal to smelt the ore mined in the surrounding hills and the woods are full of abandoned charcoal kilns. The saw mill was operating as late as twenty years ago; it turned out the oak flooring of my living room and the forge made good hoes and axes; also hardware which is still proudly exhibited by some of the local antique hunters. Both will be covered by several feet of water when the water company gets around to building its projected dam. We get our lumber from Washington now and our hardware from Sears, Roebuck; we get our culture and recreation over the radio; as for our religion, some of us have learned to substitute gardens, leaving it pretty much to the older residents to keep the church going by such arduous expedients as chicken dinners and cake sales. Last summer the Congregational minister left for Lander, Wyoming. The outside subsidy which had supplemented his meager salary could not be continued, and there is now some talk of

combining the local churches. The departed minister was a good, kindly and devoted man who used to save gasoline by making many of his calls on foot. I am sorry he is gone, and blame myself for hoeing my garden instead of going to church. Doubtless there is still sin in the community, but most of it is related to business in one way or another, and the church has somehow failed to connect up with the main business drive of the town.

This business, as already indicated, is the collection of unearned increment on land, with some incidental traffic in the charm with which the passage of years has clothed our Colonial saltbox houses, our spinning wheels, our iron kettles and other antiques. In this business we are competing strenuously with Weston, Westport, Redding, and Newtown, all of which communities have a considerable start on us. We are all parasiting upon the metropolis and upon the residual capital and income which the metropolitans salvaged from the stock market crash. The technique of this parasitism is fairly simple, although its ramifications are infinite.

You start with a realtor and a saltbox house. The realtor sells the saltbox house to an artist, who in the American middle class mythology is also quaint, interesting, and authentic in and of himself. The artist then more or less innocently connives with the realtor to sell a neighboring saltbox house to another artist who in turn lends himself to the realtor's game. As the game proceeds, both the saltbox houses and the artists tend to become less and less authentic. The later saltbox houses cost more and contain fewer sound timbers. The later artists are likely to be commercial artists, fictioneers, and advertising men. But

by that time the realtor, having acquired his nucleus of quaintness, doesn't have to bother with acquiring any more authenticity. Also, by that time the cost of living has risen, the farmers are charging city prices for vegetables and eggs, and some of the original artists have become land poor and house poor. The time is ripe for the marriage of authenticity and money and the realtor is a good schatchen. He goes to some metropolitan tycoon, who perhaps has a poetasting wife, and tells him that what he needs to take his mind off the crassnesses of holding company finance is a lovely little saltbox house in an artist community. The tycoon bites; so does the impoverished artist when he hears what the tycoon is prepared to pay for his saltbox house, his saddleback chairs, and his Colonial sugar bowls.

The game now enters its second phase. The realtor now has another kind of authenticity to exploit. He has an authentic tycoon who, feeling a little lonely, soon helps the realtor sell another saltbox house to another tycoon, who in turn brings others. They get together and start a country club, then a hunt club. Pretty soon it is the artists who feel lonely. Incidentally, most of the saltbox houses have by this time been buried under supplementary architectural and horticultural lavishness.

In this transformed community, it becomes hard for the artists to keep their minds on their art, which is likely to become somewhat less authentic the more their artisticness is exploited by the realtors. Some of them engage directly or indirectly in the real estate business. They are to be seen shamefacedly knocking little balls over green hills—are they playing golf or "making contacts"? Any day

now I expect to drop into the studio of one of my artist friends and find him doing a self-portrait of the artist attired in a red coat and riding breeches of a Master of the Hunt. The mutation of species will then be complete and I shall duly inform the American Genetic Society.

However, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. A magnificent job of community building has been achieved. Land prices are out of sight, very few saltbox houses are left and these mostly synthetic. Everything costs more than it does in New York, everything looks newer and shinier and everybody drinks more and is better dressed. (That story by the Winsted correspondent of the *New York Times* about a drunken woodchuck having been seen wearing shorts is probably authentic—well, as authentic as anything else that comes out of these artist communities.) Moreover, the artists, the near-artists, the rich and the near-rich have been presented free with a Great Purpose in Life. That purpose, as you immediately realize if you read such publications as the *Westport Town Crier* is to keep the realtors, the inn-keepers, the grocers, the hair-dressers, and dear old Connecticut Light and Power happy and prospering. To do this everybody must buy a great many things, drink a little more, if possible, and engage competitively in a multitude of activities which are glowingly described and sedulously stimulated by the local boosters. But everybody is a booster. Everybody has got to be, for financial reasons if for nothing else. A booster for what? For the unearned increment. For the "progress" of the community. A booster for this curiously barbaric enterprise in which everybody makes his living by taking in his neighbor's washing.

The most curious thing about it is that everybody seems to me more or less broke and more or less worried. Everybody has a headache: the artists because they suspect they may have stopped being artists, the tradesmen because the artists have not only lost their quaint artistic habits, but also their habits of paying bills; the realtors because the unearned increment isn't what it used to be; the tycoons because their taxes are too high.

When these headaches are practically universal, an artist community is entitled to feel that it has arrived. We in Easton are only beginning, but I fear that we are on our way. We have a number of quaintly delapidated saltbox houses. We have a few artists and writers—Ida Tarbell is one of them. And we have our tycoons; two of them.

A year or so ago Easton dedicated the new library which it has established in its new central schoolhouse. The writers received special invitations to the dedication ceremonies. Miss Tarbell contributed her books, being unable to attend. But Berton Braley and I stood up and were counted, feeling silly and even a little quaint. Nothing else was asked of us; merely to stand up and let the audience look at us. I thought the tycoons also should have been stood up for counting and inspection, but nobody mentioned them. Braley and I both puzzled over this. Why hadn't they asked one of us to make a speech? Or to help them write the pretty poor dramatic sketch which the children acted? Why hadn't they *used* us, instead of exhibiting us as grade A celebrities, which we weren't? Surely, if it had been barn-raising in pioneer days we should have been put to work, and would have felt ourselves a part of the community.

The more I think of it, the more it seems to me that we in Easton are much more quaint than our New England forefathers ever dreamed of being. They built their saltbox houses as they did because it was cheaper and more convenient. They cast their iron kettles to boil sap in, not to hang up empty before a fireless fireplace. The cabinet maker who made our antique cherry table would be called an artist today, but they called him a cabinet maker then and no nonsense about it. The tombstone maker who sculptured the death angels on tombstones dating back to 1770 in some of the Easton graveyards was an artist, even, in my opinion, a gifted artist. But they called him a stone mason and I am sure nobody ever asked him to stand up and be counted on public occasions. He was a stone mason and if he got so interested in his death angels and in what he could do with slate and sandstone that he sculptured a whole series of moving bas-relief portraits of a most interesting woman—why, that was his own affair. He got paid, as a stone mason, for carving a death angel. Nobody knows his name, although he is probably buried under one of those tombstones. But while he lived it seems to me that he probably had a fairly good time and enjoyed a self-respecting, intelligible relationship to his community, which is more than can be said of most modern artists, in artist communities or elsewhere.

What has happened to us in America? Have we lost all instinct for reality, all aptitude for simple human relationships? Is that one of the consequences—perhaps the major consequence—of our "progress"? Does that explain the intolerable flimsiness of these parasitic swank-artistic communities—why they seem like paste diamonds set in an

ugly matrix of economic and social chaos? Are artists really quaint? Indeed, they merit the insult if they allow themselves to be so used.

I think of old Charlie Babcock's ghost. Did I with my metaphysical garrulousness really succeed in shrinking him? Or was it that, failing to drive me into doing a decent day's work on his stony acres, he finally gave up in disgust and went away? Did Charlie—the thought is dreadful enough—did he end by dismissing me too as "quaint"?

On my trip across the country I saw other artist communities, but none in which art and the artist had been creatively integrated with the social and economic pattern. I saw other communities boasting neither art nor artists, and badly in need of both. Always the broken balance; always the fetishism of commodities; everywhere the vulgarization of the concept of progress. Indeed, I accumulated enough pessimism so that I began to wonder if my melancholy wasn't after all a kind of sentimental defeatism. But before I finished I had also discovered ground for a certain stoic optimism.

I had rediscovered for myself a most beautiful land, and a most vital, creative, and spiritually unsubdued people. The present is tragic enough; the years ahead will be even more tragic in all probability. But they will be less silly, less futile on the whole.

They will be *worthier*—at least I find myself able to hope this—in the sight of God and man.

3

I HURRIED TOO MUCH

IT would be good to travel over America again and do nothing but look, listen, and learn: not from politicians, "planners," officials and other microscopically informed and harassed people, but merely from the natural and human landscape. I did too little of this.

Instead, I was obliged for the first two or three months of my journey to hurry from one industrial city or state capital to another, and twice a week send off a brief digest of the ephemeral facts and impressions I had gathered. I remember showing a Pittsburgh newspaperman my credential letter from the *New York Post,* which informed all and sundry that I was doing a "social and economic survey of the United States." He grinned at me wearily and said, "Fine. Where's your army?" By the time I reached Montana I was completely waterlogged with miscellaneous information, and unable to stop hurrying—it had become a habit.

I fumbled with maps and glared apprehensively at road signs. Both seemed utterly inadequate, unimaginative, and capable, unless you watched them closely, of obscure, malicious tricks. Once, as a result of such a trick I drove fifty miles, at night, and landed in a waterless wheat town somewhere north of Great Falls, Montana. There I discovered I had driven in precisely the wrong direction. Being

wretchedly tired after four hundred miles of idiotic hustle over a landscape that had wooed me vainly with a thousand tongues of beauty and mystery, I went grumpily to bed, promising myself that I would rise early and make up for lost time.

But the next morning that slighted landscape had its revenge. A round red sun glared straight into my eyes. Blinded, I went off the road twice, but the ditch being half-full of wind-blown wheat land I was able to plow through the tumbleweed and back on the concrete.

Still I wouldn't stop, look, and listen, although the warning was clear. The landscape was fed up with me, and at the next curve I ran squarely into a post.

Fine. Twenty miles from a garage, with a smashed radiator and steering gear and other miscellaneous damage. Indignantly I glared back at that bland, red sun-face, on which I thought I detected a faint, ironic smirk.

Saul was a hustler, too, I reflected, and something like that had happened to him on the road to Damascus, although I liked him even less after he became Paul. However, maybe I had better relax a little: there was plenty of time now.

So I relaxed for three hours waiting for the wrecker. I wondered about the pioneers. Had they *seen* this landscape when they crept over it with their ox-carts and their straggling cattle? But no, they too were hurrying toward water holes, and tortured by fear of Indians. . . . The Indians, then. Yes, perhaps they had had moments of quietness in the intervals of tribal warfare. Surely their nerves were less raveled than those of their ludicrously confused and quarreling conquerors. You can feel it in their songs

when they sing them, which is rarely: also in their gift of silence, which they still keep.

A few miles south of Havre, Montana, I had picked up a middle-aged squaw who had sat silently beside me for fifty miles. Baffled by her monosyllabic answers to my questions I had turned my attention to the landscape: the wide flat valley of the Missouri lifting on the south into low buttes, and beyond these the sharp, pure line of the snow-covered Rockies. Such spacious, remote and flowing slopes and mesas! And the austere peaks that shadowed them, what were they saying? Some sort of intransigent affirmation or negation—both, I supposed. If I lived with them, I reflected, as did the ranchers whose low shacks were pin points in the great distances, then I would have to listen, and perhaps learn.

I turned to the squaw beside me. She, too, was looking and listening. And her face, as I remember it, was quieter and more beautiful than any other face, of all the scores of hitch-hikers I gave rides to.

Indeed, most of those conquering whites who rode with me were profoundly unquiet. They were in flight from somebody or something, going nowhere in particular, and garrulous with bewilderment and half-confessed terror. Sitting beside me, while that irritatingly constant motor affronted the perfect distances of desert and mountain with its meaningless conquest, these acquaintances of an hour, a day, told me all, without my asking. The most intimate confidences of the mind and of the heart were babbled into the ear of a stranger who could neither halt nor soothe them: why the virtuous young man had left his wife (several versions of this, all with a tinge of McFad-

den-Hollywood phoniness). Why the much-painted, no-longer-young woman was not what she seemed to be and probably was. How the elderly notion salesman had been reduced to hitch-hiking.

My notebooks are full of these confidences. Some of them were so laden with genuine pain that the back of my head aches when I think of them. Most of them—the blind and butchered lives, the pitiful prides, the empty hatreds—had best be covered with silence. The civilization must be pretty bad if it yields such a crop of horrors to any traveler who cares to gather it.

Incidentally, although I was repeatedly warned against picking up hitch-hikers, I found them to be the most harmless of people, who rarely offended and were frequently most considerate and helpful. This was true even of the two or three who, I suspected, might be small-time criminals. Most of them were just workmen looking vainly for work, and they had, I thought, a right to a ride with anybody going their way.

Driving at night through a deluge, south from Seattle, I was stopped by a hatless, coatless, and bedraggled young man who promptly offered to pay me for taking him the seventy-five miles he had to go. Why was he in such a hurry, I asked? Why didn't he put up for the night somewhere, or at least stay in a filling station until it stopped raining?

The faucet of his mind was wide open and the story came out with a rush. Himself was evidently a subject he thought about a great deal, and with deep earnestness. He had graduated from high school in 1930 and was promised a position in the apprentice school of a large engineering

corporation. But when the depression deepened this offer was postponed indefinitely. He had made a bare living doing minor electrical repairing and somehow had managed to get himself married. The girl was young and spoiled. She had become attached to a friend of his whom they had taken in as a boarder. She had left him and gone to live, extraordinarily enough, with the parents of the false friend, while he had retired to a remote shack in the woods, rented for twenty dollars a year.

He still loved his wife. He had just come from visiting her, had tried vainly to persuade her to return to him. She had needed a new dress and he had given her almost all his money, including the bus fare he had hoped to reserve for himself. Then he had started back on foot, at night, and in the rain.

Hadn't he had enough of it, I asked? Surely, there were other women. No, not for him, he assured me, and he recited the litany of the virtues he had been taught and had always striven to cultivate. He had been hungry, he said, but had never asked for relief. Would he have a cigarette? No, he didn't smoke. A drink, then, to quiet his shivering? No, he didn't drink.

We reached the town where he was to leave me and either walk or obtain a ride twenty miles farther on a side road. It was still raining. It was late December and he had neither overcoat nor hat. He looked hungry.

I invited him to have dinner with me. He declined. Why? Had I offended him? No, not at all. He wasn't really hungry: also he had never begged and didn't intend to begin. I spent ten minutes vainly trying to persuade him.

When I came out of the restaurant he was still standing

in the rain at a stop light, thumbing the passing cars. Perhaps I am lacking in respect for the traditional virtues, but I thought him rather stupid and humorless. According to the Horatio Alger theory, that young man should be president of the United States some day. But he won't be, whereas Huey Long might have been.

The next morning I drove for a hundred miles, with the rain and fogs still swirling over the fir country of southern Washington. The young hitch-hiker beside me was wise, he assured me. He had a wife and two children somewhere in southern Oregon. He hadn't seen them for over a year. He guessed they were getting relief. He had bummed here and there; worked a little in the lumber camps and on ranches; had never had any difficulty in picking up a woman when he wanted one. He was consciously irresponsible, full of scabrous braggadocio, and perhaps almost as much of a knave as he claimed to be. I didn't like him, but he had the qualities of his defects. He seemed a little less stupid and bemused than my friend of the night before.

Often, driving alone across the lonely distances of the West, the faces and figures of these chance acquaintances swarmed before my eyes, like gnats in the sun. What profound failure of American life did this drift of human atoms signify and embody, and to what would it lead? The West was newer and I felt it more there, but even east of the Mississippi it was much the same. The people had not possessed the landscape, nor had the landscape possessed them. The balance was indeed broken. Would the landscape some day reject all these people, all the

vulgar and unfeeling falsities they had created and permitted, just as it had rebuked and rejected me? Certainly some profound profanation of the human spirit had occurred, some fundamental dislocation of the natural ecology. . . .

The Indians, knowing little and feeling much, still danced to bring rain, to propitiate the offended gods. We did not dance: we were danced at the end of an electronic vibration. Nor did we pray, perhaps because, having allowed our own godhood to be emasculated, we had lost the power to pray.

LABOR AND THE TEMPER OF THE UNEMPLOYED

4

NO TRUCE ON THE COAL AND STEEL FRONT

THE day the President called for a six months' truce between capital and labor, I left Washington and headed west. It was Sunday, the mild Virginia landscape was yielding to the first breath of autumn, and I resolved not to hurry. Church bells were ringing. The church, I was sure, would have something to say about that truce.

I was not disappointed. The rector of the Episcopal church at Aldie had heard of the truce. He had also heard of planning, and so, he pointed out, had St. Paul. We were all members of one body. The ideal society exhibits a perfect adjustment of its members. Let us do our work in the station to which we are called. We are not born equal. That was the Gallic, infidel lie which Thomas Jefferson had insinuated into the Declaration of Independence. The unrest of the world is caused by the unwillingness of men to do the work for which they are called. All men are called, but all men are not worthy of their calling.

A few hours later I was driving through the coal towns of the Alleghenies. The churches were smaller and shabbier. Some of them were falling to pieces and it was evident that their bells would never ring again. Why? I picked up hitch-hikers and asked them this, but they were not interested. The silence of the church bells did not trouble them. It was the mine whistles. Many of them had

stopped blowing altogether, and those that were left blew infrequently; two or three days a week when the mines were working, so that comparatively few miners were called and fewer still were chosen. What good did it do to ask for a truce between capital and labor, they said? Coal would still have to fight a losing fight against oil and electric power. Which meant that the coal operators would have to fight each other; and the miners would have to fight the operators; and the union miners would have to fight the non-union miners; and the rank-and-file miners would have to fight both their leaders and Mr. Roosevelt's peace emissaries. Why did the miners have to fight? Because most of them didn't have jobs, and those who did averaged from $500 to $800 a year.

Pennsylvania Was Quiet

Farther west I picked up a young miner who was headed for New Kensington to join his father. He had been fired after the collapse of a strike in a mine near Uniontown. He hadn't heard about the truce. But he hoped he would find something like it farther north—unless the blacklist caught up with him.

In Aliquippa, where the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation has a big plant, I did find a kind of truce. The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Tin, and Steel Workers was holding its meetings in Ambridge, across the river, because the steel corporation owns Aliquippa—all of it, including the forces of law and order. Aliquippa was peaceful. It was as quiet as the inside of an ice-box.

Pittsburgh was peaceful too. Steel production in the

Pittsburgh district was down to 17 per cent of capacity; it had dropped to 8 per cent two weeks before. Yes, things were pretty quiet around Pittsburgh. The hearings of the Steel Labor Board were as orderly as you please. The Duquesne local of the Amalgamated had asked the board to compel the Carnegie Steel Corporation to hold an election to determine whether or not the Amalgamated was to represent the workers for purposes of collective bargaining. Counsel for the corporation said the workers had already held an election and that 87 per cent of them had voted for the company union; hence there was no unrest in Duquesne, and neither the Amalgamated nor the government had any business on the premises.

Steel workers crowded the back part of the court room—Slavs, Poles, Italians, Negroes; heavy-set men with thick forearms and bleak, impassive faces. The eloquent counsel for the company union (paid by the company) consulted the records of the company union (furnished by a company-paid stenographer employed to take down every word spoken at their meetings) and proved that the company union representatives had settled scores of complaints in favor of the men. Therefore there was no unrest among the Duquesne steel workers. I saw some of the steel workers smile wryly at this, but none spoke out of turn.

Later some of them took the stand. They proved that the Amalgamated had signed up a majority of the employees of the Duquesne plant. Objection by counsel for the corporation. Employees as of what date? Were they union members in good standing? It is a nice question. Is a union member who hasn't paid his dues because the company has given him only one, two or three days of

work a week, or who has been fired on one pretext or another but actually because of union activity—is such a member entitled to participate in an election? What does the law say?

The steel corporation lawyers clicked and pounded with the precision of machines. Pale, hawk-like men; men of steel, not steel workers. Implacable robot functionaries who had never come closer to an open-hearth furnace than the bookkeeping entries, red ink entries these days, that prove everything is impossible: the plants can't be operated at a profit, they can't be closed without huge losses, wages can't be increased, a genuine union can't be permitted. They said the Duquesne workers were satisfied, that the company union was a thing of beauty, and what if it wasn't?—the government had no jurisdiction on the premises. Legal hocus-pocus. William J. Spang, speaking for the Duquesne local of the Amalgamated, was like a bear caught in a slimed fish net. He did his best, but his men did better. No unrest? A tall Negro took the stand. Yes, he had seen plenty of unrest in Duquesne. He thumped his chest and his voice boomed:

"I got some of that unrest right here!"

At that the shabby court room came alive and the legal make-believe blew away like smoke. Suddenly you saw it as if you were there: the dreary, sodden steel towns; the vast, sprawling weight of collapsed industry choking the valleys of the Monongahela, the Allegheny, the Ohio; the blind, bitter clutch of the steel masters on this clutter of inert machinery; the aimless drift of harassed, half-starved men through the streets; the dogged struggle of the union against a terror that speaks suavely in court, but barks out

of the muzzles of automatics in the walled towns where steel is made and where, under cover of pious phrases, the Amalgamated is being whittled and starved and blacklisted to death.

I went to Weirton, West Virginia, shrine of the open shop patriots, while the government, at Wilmington, was trying to compel Mr. Weir to hold an election of his employees. The big shots were all away, but everything was tranquil. This was seen to by eighteen deputy sheriffs, paid by the company. The local bartender talked out of the side of his mouth. He didn't know where the headquarters of the Amalgamated were; he didn't know anything. The Amalgamated hall was across the street. I talked to a dozen members of the Weirton local, including the treasurer of New Deal Lodge No. 33. It was meeting night, but the hall was far from crowded. With a company spotter standing outside, or parked across the street, the men are likely to walk right past the hall rather than into it, even though they hold cards in the union. (The Amalgamated leaders claimed to have organized from 80 to 95 per cent of the Weirton steel workers.)

Things being as quiet as they are, however, the company union is safer. The company union celebrated Labor Day by holding a Pageant of All the Nations on Marland Heights, where the company has built a new swimming pool. A young, good-looking Italian member of the Amalgamated thought he'd like to see the fireworks—life is pretty dull in Weirton—and went up the hill. A hard-faced man came out from under a bridge, stared at him, and signaled to another man. A good time was being had

by all around the swimming pool, and the fireworks were beginning to go off. But the youth started walking rapidly away from there. A shot rang out, and the youth ran. Shouts, and another shot. As he told the story, I could see him running—head back, elbows up, legs pumping—I remembered running like that myself during the War. But this was not war. Things were pretty quiet in Weirton. The mile-long steel plant, caged behind sheet metal, barbed wire, and bullet-scarred concrete, lay stretched out like some mythical prehistoric monster, along the narrow shelf between the steep Allegheny foothills and the Ohio. The monster mustn't die, because then the men who feed it and nurse it would die; true some of them have died already and more are likely to die this winter. The Hancock County relief director said that relief was insufficient —he was constantly asking for more. Starvation, under its official euphemisms, malnutrition and the various ills induced by cold and hunger—is likely to be a grim fact this winter in this country of coal, milk, and other surpluses.

In the middle of the fertile corn lands of northwest Ohio there is a shrine dedicated to no heathenish Goddess of Fertility, but to the memory of Warren Gamaliel Harding. It is small, consisting merely of some immensely heavy marble columns within which a weeping willow grows out of a bed of myrtle. It cost a million dollars to build, and a substantial part of this sum was collected, in pennies, from American school children. Scores of devout American men, women and children visit this shrine every day. Persons who underestimate the inertias of the American social situation should also visit this shrine and feel the immense,

tranquil conviction that roots these noble columns, reared to the memory of the cat's-paw of the Ohio gang, in the sod of the American prairie.

They Grow Onions in Hardin County

From Marion we drove to McGuffey, shipping center for the onion growers of Hardin County. I am told that the McGuffey who drained this 17,000-acre tract of black alluvial muck land went broke and that the Scioto Land Company now owns a large share of it. Other big growers are the New York Coal Company and J. B. Stanbaugh and Sons. These, with a few others, make up the National Onion Growers Association, which controls the storage and most of the shipping from this district. Mr. Stanbaugh is on the county relief commission; families get relief to supplement the ten-cent-an-hour wage they earn working in his onion fields.

Hardin County is indeed a record-breaking county. It boasts one of the lowest agricultural wages in the country, the highest death rate from tuberculosis in the state, very high infant mortality, and equally notable records with respect to typhoid, diphtheria, malaria, and dysentery. In the interest of the truce between capital and labor one should not stress the connection between the health records and the wages paid the imported Kentucky and Tennessee mountaineers who plant, weed, and harvest the onions. Or the affidavit by a widow to the effect that she and her two boys, aged eleven and twelve, raised 1,600 bushels of onions and got just $10 for their share. Things like that should be suppressed, also statements by the

onion workers that the women and children have been obliged to crawl on their hands and knees weeding onions, ten hours, four and a half miles, a day; that the gang bosses have been known to stamp on the children's hands to hurry them along.

Indeed, we found things pretty quiet in McGuffey, although about half the strikers were still out, having rejected the proposed settlement of 15 cents an hour. I talked to Okey O'Dell, the strike leader who was out on bail waiting trial for daring to resist and defy his kidnapers. (The leaders of the mob who kidnaped him were never indicted.) He is a quiet, gentle Southerner, a bit huskier and more energetic than the average of his fellows. He lives alone in his shack now, having sent his wife and children back to Kentucky to prevent their being kidnaped, as had been threatened. The shack is better than most. Out on the marshes whole families were crowded into single rooms; and after the evictions they slept and cooked in the roadside ditches. Did not the growers own all the land?

Onions are cheap in McGuffey, although 40 miles away in Toledo they sell for 7 cents a pound. The share-croppers get around a cent a pound for their share, which they are practically obliged to sell to the Onion Growers Association. In the store at McGuffey a share-cropper tried to sell us onions. They were sound white onions, he said, although not large, on account of the drought. We said we were not onion buyers, not in the market, and a strange thing happened. He cried. He sobbed. Yes, he was a little drunk. He had started getting drunk three weeks before when his two young children

had died of typhoid. There were half a dozen people in the store when he said this and they nodded confirmingly. If he had been very drunk it would not have been so bad. But he was half sober. And he kept crying louder and louder, like an animal. He was still crying when we left the store.

In Kenton, the county seat, the relief director explained that they had been obliged to cut relief in the onion district from $2.50 to $2.00 a week for a family of three. There wasn't enough to go around. If he could get more from the state, he, Allan Ochs—whom the strikers have charged with flagrant discrimination in the giving of relief—would be only too glad to spend it. Maybe there would be a tuberculosis sanitarium in Hardin County, built with PWA money. Maybe the government would start subsistence homesteads in the muck lands. Meanwhile, I asked, why didn't the county health officer condemn those shallow wells? Why didn't he burn those germ-infested shacks and insist that decent shelter be provided for the onion workers? But no, that would have been to break the truce. That would have been war, war against the feudal lords of Hardin County, who have built fine solid homes for themselves and their foremen, who have drilled deep wells to supply their drinking water, who can look out of their windows and see lines of men, women and children crawling on hands and knees up and down the mile-long onion rows. It is a picturesque sight—almost medieval, and right in the heart of America. See America first.

Toledo's Farewell House

In Toledo the windows of the Auto-Lite plant smashed in the strike a few months before were mended, and business was going on as usual. The police of Toledo are getting paid regularly now and perhaps next time they'll attack the strikers, which they did not do in the last strike. I interviewed Edward Lamb, the liberal attorney for the Auto-Lite workers, and he described grimly a recent attempt to frame him. It appeared, incidentally, that back of the scenes, and quite apart from the labor struggle, the automotive manufacturers go right on chiseling each other and their stockholders with termite-like assiduity—there is no truce in business.

On the unemployed front I witnessed only two minor engagements. Three hundred members of the Single Men's Protective Union, led by Sam Pollak of the Unemployed League, marched into the office of the relief administration demanding rent and food relief instead of the care provided in the Toledo shelter, known among the unemployed as "Farewell House." The next day I attended a demonstration of the Wood County Unemployed League. Comparing the quality of the two groups I began to understand something of the problem of the unemployed organizers. The flop-house contingent—the transients—are almost impossible to organize. They have dropped too low in the human scale, have become docile and spiritless. Ultimately they present no threat, no problem to government, except that of disposing of the wreckage of what were once good workingmen. But Wood County, which is

half agricultural and half industrial—you can smell Heinz ketchup from one end of the county to the other—has a fighting unemployed organization. They still have some physical and moral stamina; they can resist relief cuts, and it is important that they do, for if they don't they will have less energy to fight with next time. But even if they succeed merely in preserving the status quo they are really beaten, for the cumulative effect of trying to live on the meager relief allowance—around $20 a month for an average family in Ohio—is bound to be disintegrating.

This is what the truce meant in the relations between workers and employers, between government and its relief clients. It didn't look like a truce to me. It looked like war—a quiet, slow, terrible war of attrition.

5

AMERICA'S FIFTH ESTATE: THE UNEMPLOYED

IT was part of my journalistic assignment to interview business men, politicians, labor leaders, public officials, the employed and the unemployed. It did not take me long to realize that after five years of depression the last-named category constitutes a new social bloc, a fifth estate in the capitalist society.

In the cities I sat on the benches outside the offices of the relief directors whom I was waiting to interview. The unemployed sat beside me and talked, and I learned a good deal about the business of being on relief. By the time I saw the relief director I was usually in a position to adorn his statistics with a half dozen more or less pertinent footnotes.

The relief client is in business, and the relief director is in business; they are both in business just as much as the butcher, the baker, or, higher up the line, the banker, merchant prince or manufacturer. The business of the relief client is first, to get on relief, which in some states requires the signing of a pauper's oath; also the concealment of such residual assets of money, property, or solvent relatives as he may have. Usually, there is nothing or very little to conceal and that little is ignored by the more sophisticated investigators for the very sensible reason that if the client still retains some resources he has that much

better chance of ultimately getting a job, so that the case may be "closed." But in theory, of course, the relief client is cheating the state unless he is utterly broke, hungry and ragged, and the relief scale in every community I visited is calculated to keep him and his family in precisely that condition. If that statement seems extreme, I point out that its truth is officially acknowledged in the published statements of both federal and state relief officials. If it is true in New York City, where in June, 1935, the relief scale for a family of four was around fifty dollars a month, how much more true is it in Ohio, where the budgetary allowance is less than half that, or in some of the rural counties of the South where the figure is again halved.

Again, the theory is that the physical and moral discomforts incident to semi-starvation will stimulate the energy of the relief client in looking for a job. Actually, these discomforts are sufficiently debilitating so that the effect is quite opposite, not always, but usually. The residual energy of the client is likely to be directed less toward getting a new job than toward improving his present job, which is that of being on relief.

In Toledo I talked to a workman in his twenties who estimated that the business of being on relief took up about half of his time. His present errand at the relief office was to get his oil stove repaired. It was his third trip and he estimated that before all the necessary red tape had been unwound he would have spent at least three full days and walked about eight miles. Next week it would be something else.

"I figure," said this man, "that if I could get me a job

even at eight dollars a week we'd be better off and I wouldn't have to walk so much."

This man had been on relief only a few weeks. In a few months, I reflected, he would be better "adjusted" to the business of being on relief. He would keep business hours on the porch of his home, and when the relief investigator called, he would put his hands on his hips and say, "Well, my dear, what can I do for you today?"—this being the greeting which a relief investigator told me she had received from a veteran client.

The relief investigator is also in business; her job is to keep her clients—she has from fifty to a hundred to take care of—out of the office. Her success in this respect is the chief measure of her efficiency. To this end she devotes all her resources of tact to explaining the inexplicable contradiction between the official minimum subsistence budget and the amount the client gets in cash or food orders every two weeks, and in answering the unanswerable questions regarding what the client is to do about clothes, about the rent, about John's rupture, about the baby's need of more fresh milk. She is responsible to her supervisor who is responsible to the county relief director, who is responsible to the state Emergency Relief Administrations, who are responsible, since all the states receive varying percentages of Federal aid, to Mr. Hopkins' office in Washington. There is, of course, much businesslike bluffing, trading and compromising all up and down the line.

The relief business is also in competition with "legitimate" business, as, for example, the business of berry raising in south Jersey, where corporations so engaged paid

and housed their workers so miserably that the relief clients in the Jersey cities, where the relief scale is relatively high, refused to take the jobs offered during the berry-picking season. The result was that thousands of dollars of berries rotted on the vines. I encountered similar competition all across the continent—wherever the minima of the relief program impinged upon local conditions of agricultural or industrial peonage.

The issue of such conflicts depends upon the backbone of the local relief administrator as affected by the pressures the local employers are able to bring to bear. Where, as in Hardin County, Ohio, and elsewhere, the employers and the relief administration are substantially identical, relief is used to subsidize the employers' business and the power to give or to withhold relief is used to break strikes. Mr. Hopkins' office recognizes this tendency and combats it, but not always successfully. In North Carolina, for example, relief clients were told to pick strawberries at 35 cents a day, or be stricken from the relief rolls.

There is at least one other contender in this business-like arena. It is the various organizations of the unemployed, such as the Ohio Unemployed League, affiliated with the National Unemployed League, and led by the Workers Party. The Unemployed League competes with the relief investigators, supervisors, and directors for the allegiance of the unemployed. A "good" member of the Fifth Estate will have nothing to do with the League, just as a "good nigger" in the South will have nothing to do with the Communist Party or with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, organized by the Socialists. But if the virtue of the "good" relief client goes unrewarded, as is

likely to happen; if his family faces eviction and the Unemployed League Grievance Committee tells him it can force the relief bureau to give him rent money, or if not, that the League will stop the eviction anyway, then he is likely to join the League. The Grievance Committee then either makes good on its promises or fails to make good. If the former, the member of the Fifth Estate may even pay his dues of 5 cents a month. But his loyalty is unstable, since he is subject to the salesmanship of the relief investigator, the security of whose job depends on her not having too many "tough" clients. She therefore uses whatever psychological and material persuasions she can command to mollify this toughness. Even if her sympathies are with the relief clients, as often happens, she is a servant of the state, engaged in the protection of property, and her chief enemy is the Grievance Committee of the local unemployed organization.

The experience of the unemployed organizations is always and everywhere pretty much the same. The turnover of membership is high and the total membership fluctuates widely. A cut in the relief rate or a threat of such a cut is usually followed by an accession of new memberships; but if the unemployed organization protests successfully so that the cut is restored or the threatened cut suspended, then membership drops again, and dues are unpaid.

However, it works both ways. Although the unemployed organization is likely to lose much of its temporary "floating" membership, once a particular victory is won, a fraction of the gains are kept, and the morale of the fighting units is stepped up. It is not the petty bourgeois "morale" that social workers strive to inculcate, but a militant work-

ing class morale, and as I observed it, far sounder and healthier than anything dreamed of in the average social worker's philosophy. I saw homeless, empty-bellied workers fighting bitterly to aid, not themselves, but their fellows. I saw here and there the stirring beginnings of a working class fellowship, a working class culture which within itself exhibited far more of the primary virtues of honesty, fortitude, generosity and devotion than the bourgeois culture from which the militant unemployed workers had seceded.

In the philosophy of the American Federation of Labor, the business of being unemployed is not a craft, and is therefore not subject to organization. In more practical terms, the Fifth Estate is a shifting category of the destitute who can pay little or no dues, so that organizing them can scarcely be regarded as a practical or profitable business. Hence it was left to the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, and the Workers Party to do what little has been done to organize this crucial sector of the American working population. The difficulties of the job can scarcely be exaggerated. Where the ordinary labor union confronts the individual employer, plus, of course, his Chamber of Commerce, trade association, publishing, police and court allies, the unemployed organization is fighting the state power directly. A strike of employed workers or even the threat of a strike, if properly timed, can cause serious losses to the employers and so force concessions. But a strike of work relief clients runs directly afoul of the government.

The unemployed unions apply the principle of collective bargaining too, but with a difference. In the nature

of the case such unions are industrial, federal, and committed to revolutionary objectives. Whereas an economic equilibrium based on the collective bargaining of labor unions versus employers and employers' associations is conceivable (if one ignores the growing contradiction between production and consumption embodied in the Marxian concept of surplus value) an economic and social equilibrium based on the maintenance by the state of a growing Fifth Estate of the disemployed and the destitute—such an equilibrium can scarcely be presented to unemployed workers as an objective to fight for. For the Fifth Estate, at least, there is quite evidently no salvation within the framework of our present social order, since "recovery" to the 1925-27 or even the 1929 level would not eliminate the unemployed category.

The experience of the past year would indicate that a strike of employed workers can scarcely be won without the neutralization, or better, the activization of this Fifth Estate of the unemployed. The Toledo Auto-Lite strike and the Minneapolis truck drivers' strike are good examples of the successful fusion of the employed and the unemployed in a unified strike strategy.

Probably a successful fusion of the employed and the unemployed on a national scale will never be possible short of a revolutionary situation: the workers would then be in a position to take over the state power. Long before that time arrives, however, we shall see the development of many local so-called "revolutionary situations," necessarily abortive by reason of their local and transitory character; also, and more or less coincidentally, the develop-

ment of fascist or quasi-fascist repressive activities. On an earlier trip in April of 1934, I had seen the premonitory outline of such a situation in Meigs County, Ohio, about ten days before the Toledo strike.

6

THE FIFTH ESTATE IN ACTION

IN the early years of the last century, long barges, equipped only with sweeps, floated the produce of the early settlements down the Ohio River to the Mississippi and to the Gulf. At infrequent intervals the boatmen would pass clearings running down to the river and wave greetings to the lonely, hard-bitten pioneers who stood on the banks.

The river traffic is steam-powered now, and the settlements are almost continuous. But the descendants of the pioneers still stand on the banks and wave, and strangely enough, their isolation is deeper and more tragic than that of their forefathers. The pioneers conquered the wilderness; they dispossessed the Indians; they destroyed the forest—it was their foe; they trapped and shot the game; they laid bare the top-soil and plowed it, and much of it washed down the river to the Gulf. Coming up the Mississippi to New Orleans, I saw big dredges pumping that top-soil out of the ship channel. But underneath the top-soil those Ohio pioneers found coal, and some of them became rich; they disemboweled the steep hills all the way from Pittsburgh to the Mississippi.

The pioneers were not idealists. They were simple, rough, land-greedy men. The wilderness was their foe and they fought it, to make their bread, to feed their families.

They did not dream that in the brief cycle of a century their descendants would be fighting in a new, man-created wilderness.

The descendants of those Ohio pioneers are not idealists. They are simple, rough, vigorous men, fighting to make their bread, to feed their families. They are struggling to tear from their throats the writhing tentacles of an obsolete, stricken economy of industrial capitalism which for at least two decades has failed to feed them enough; which has starved them when they remained passive; which has beaten, shot, and jailed them when they revolted; which since 1929 has pinched their bellies beyond human endurance.

Coal production in southern Ohio was down to 20 per cent of capacity when I was there. For years the production of bituminous coal has provided one of the most tragic surpluses of our "surplus economy": surplus coal, surplus machinery; stranded capital, stranded men, women and children, stranded and paralyzed local governments.

In 1776, when the founding fathers raised the flag of revolution, it was not at first the Stars and Stripes, but a crude, violent piece of agitational bunting: the native rattlesnake, coiled ready to strike, and with a motto: "Don't Tread on Me." In the summer of 1933 a demonstration of the Ohio Unemployed League occupied for two days the grounds of the state capitol at Columbus. Over the balcony of the state house the thin-bellied coal-diggers, steel workers, and farmers flung that same crude, violent, rattlesnake flag. And a year later Louis Budenz, stormy petrel of the radical labor movement, carried that

flag, the flag of Patrick Henry and John Paul Jones, at the head of the huge picket line that besieged the Auto-Lite plant in Toledo.

"Peaceful persuasion, peaceful persuasion!" shouted Budenz. *"Photograph that man!"* The scab who tried to break through the picket lines was photographed—with a brick, a circumstance which greatly distressed the Nice Nellies of the liberal press.

It was about ten days before the bricks started flying in Toledo that I accompanied Budenz, who was one of the organizers of the Ohio Unemployed League, on a hurry call to Pomeroy, county seat of Meigs County. FERA had taken over the CWA projects, and the relief administrator, headed by the adjutant general of the National Guard, had attempted to reduce the wage scale from 50 cents an hour to 40 and in some counties 30 cents an hour. In eleven counties, the Leagues had struck and more or less completely tied up the local FERA projects.

What had happened in Pomeroy was more or less typical. The Sheriff of Meigs County had stood on the porch of the white-pillared city hall, read the riot act, and ordered the members of the Meigs County Unemployed League to cease, desist, disperse, etc. Whereat his neighbors and former friends, the unemployed miners who constituted the League, had spat vigorously, told the Sheriff not to be a damned fool, and warned the Sheriff's hastily improvised posse of deputies not to push them around. They had assembled peacefully, as had been their custom, in front of the city hall, and they would depart peacefully, but they wouldn't stand any nonsense from the

alleged ex-bootleggers and other riff-raff on whom the Sheriff had pinned deputy badges. Moreover, they remarked, the Sheriff must know he wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance when he stood for reëlection next November. The Sheriff knew, but he had his orders, and he jailed the leading members of the League, including its Grievance Committee.

The substance of this information had been telephoned to the headquarters of the Ohio Unemployed League in Columbus where I happened to be at the time, and it was suggested that as a traveling journalist I might learn something about law and order if I made the trip.

The car, like all the cars used in League business, was a wreck. Every time we tried to drive it faster than fifteen miles an hour we had to stop and mend a tire, so we had plenty of time to talk. Budenz, who had been educated in a Jesuit College and trained as a lawyer, had spent a year of his life driving just such a car from town to town organizing the League; sleeping in fire houses in winter and in the open fields in summer. He was beginning to pay the price of this effort. He had a violent headache and talked to quiet the throb of his inflamed sinuses. He talked about Moses, brilliantly and continuously. By the time we had traveled a hundred and fifty miles he had achieved a fascinating and convincing reconstruction of the Old Testament legend in terms of the Marxian class struggle. Bricks without straw—obviously nothing but the business-like Pharaoh's "conscientious withdrawal of efficiency" from industry. The sojourn in the desert—clearly Moses' planned method of weeding out kulaks, labor fakers, and other bourgeois-minded individuals and conditioning a

new generation of Israelites in terms of a collectivized social psychology.

In Pomeroy I saw the Sheriff, a minor relief official, the rather unimpressive optometrist-politician who headed the county Board of Supervisors, and other constituted authorities. I also interviewed members of the Meigs Unemployed League, both in Pomeroy and later in Columbus, and I came to a somewhat surprising conclusion. It seemed to me that the official government of Meigs County was distinctly inferior in brains, character, and humanity to the unofficial government which these starving miners had created for themselves in the form of the Unemployed League. The official government represented ownership and its functionaries were chiefly middle-class people. The unofficial government represented labor out of a job and its functionaries, the officers of the League, looked better, thought better and acted better than anybody else I saw in Meigs County. As a matter of fact, this unofficial government had been supplementing the inadequacies of the official government for some time past, so that when the official government in the person of the Sheriff read the riot act and put the unofficial government in jail the constituted authorities permitted some rather unfortunate things to happen.

Jim Bowen had reason to know, better than most, the incompetence of the constituted authorities. He couldn't afford to die any more than he could afford to live. And if he had to die, he certainly should have had more sense than to choose, as his moment for passing, the day the Sheriff jailed the Grievance Committee of the League.

Because what happened was that Jim Bowen lay dead in his bed for four days while the constituted authorities marked time, and the demoralized forces of the League struggled frantically to get him buried. The town allowed $25 for the funeral, but that didn't do much good, because Jim's family couldn't provide a burial plot in the town cemetery. And the undertaker required $20 in advance before he would move the body.

So nothing much happened, except that what was left of Jim began to smell, and the members of the League who sat up with the corpse had to move into the next room.

On the fourth day, the members of the Grievance Committee were released from jail, and after much telegraphing, a relative of the family donated a spot of burial ground four miles from Pomeroy. Everybody was pretty much upset by this time, so the members of the League dug the grave in the wrong spot and then had to dig another one. But the undertaker moved the body at last, and Jim Bowen got the good rest the doctor had so often recommended, but which Jim couldn't afford. He'd hung on as long as he could, because it costs more to die outright in Meigs County than it does to starve to death decently and gradually. In May, 1934, the budgetary allowance was only $3.50 a week for a family of five, that being a generous increase over the earlier schedule of 75 cents a week for adults and 25 cents a week for children.

People die trying to eat those statistics. They die in America, just as they die in China. And what they die of is starvation and despair.

Not officially, of course. Officially, Jim Bowen died of

dropsy and heart trouble. But it seemed to me that the official records needed amplification in this case, so before I left I saw that a series of affidavits went to Washington, and I kept copies for my files. Washington had the statistics already, I was sure; but I thought Washington, or the President, or somebody beside that blustering, worried Sheriff and that frozen-faced optometrist would be interested in knowing what came of the attempt to eat those statistics. Here are some extracts:

James Bowen, a member of the Meigs County Chapter of the Ohio Unemployed League, appeared at a regular meeting of the Chapter, and told the Grievance Committee, of which Raymond Smith, of Pomeroy, is chairman, that Mrs. Bowen had borne a child, that the child had died shortly after birth, that he had no sheets with which to change the bed, and that there was nothing to eat in the house. The Grievance Committee was unable to find Henry Corradini, the Pomeroy Relief Commissioner, but found Walter Compton, one of the three county Commissioners. Mr. Compton, after some delay, got hold of Mrs. N. G. Swain, the local case administrator. Mrs. Swain secured an order for sheets and an order for groceries. Dr. Manning Daniels of Pomeroy delivered the child and informed Mr. Bowen that the baby could not live; it is my belief and was the belief of Mr. Bowen that the child had no chance of living because the mother had not had enough to eat during the period of pregnancy. During the pregnancy of his wife, Mr. Bowen had been ill with heart trouble and dropsy, but had done some CWA and FERA work in spite of his condition, in order to get some food for the family, consisting of himself, his wife, and a fourteen-year-old boy.

After the death of his child Mr. Bowen's health became

worse. He had difficulty in securing medical attention because the local doctors at that time had not been paid for services rendered in behalf of the Relief Administration. On the evening of May 3, the Grievance Committee of the League reported that Bowen was fatally ill and wanted a doctor. I called up Dr. Daniels and was informed by him that the local doctors were then holding a meeting and had practically decided that they would not attend any more relief patients until they had been paid for past services by the Relief Administration; Dr. Daniels said that three months' bills were overdue; he said that Mr. Bowen was dying and that he could not be helped; that he, Dr. Daniels, had been so informed by Dr. Ellis, the local health officer who had attended Bowen and given him treatment of which he, Dr. Daniels, approved; that but for this circumstance, he, Dr. Daniels, would have been willing to visit Bowen out of consideration for the League's request. Bowen died early on the morning of May 7. Raymond Smith, chairman of the Grievance Committee of the League, assumed responsibility for making burial arrangements, and sent a telegram to relatives of Bowen. That morning Smith, with eight other members of the League, was arrested following a meeting in the city hall, charged with incitement to riot.

This affidavit, which is confirmed by others, is signed by Clyde Brickles of Pomeroy. The rest of the story of Jim Bowen has been told.

After I saw the Sheriff I went up the gulch along a narrow road that skirted the mine dumps and found a member of the Grievance Committee concerning whom the Sheriff had warned me: he was a bad fellow; he had stolen, been arrested, and received a suspended sentence.

All this was true; the man admitted it. He had stolen some dynamite with which to blast the stumps out of a patch of hillside, which might, he thought, grow some corn. He had stolen some automobile tires he needed for his ancient car—he had to have a car if he was to pick up such odd jobs as were available around the township. He had stolen very little, and only what he had to have; you can't make bricks without straw. He and his old mother had been getting weaker and weaker on the relief diet of gravy and potlikker, and he felt that he had to help himself somehow.

The old mother didn't approve of this extra-legal self-help. I made notes to the accompaniment of her lamentations. The family had always been respectable, she said. Nothing I could say convinced her that, under the circumstances, the effort of her son to help himself, coupled as it was with continuous efforts to help others, was not merely excusable, but represented a creditable and respectable exhibition of manhood. . . .

It was past midnight when we got back to Columbus, but lights were still burning in the headquarters of the Ohio Unemployed League—the ancient brick building which represents the unofficial capitol of Ohio's Fifth Estate. I found the Secretary contemplating gloomily a pile of mimeographed letters. The last nickels had gone for mimeograph ink, and there was nothing left to buy postage; also, since gasoline money was scarce, how was he going to get to the important conference he had called? . . . Well, he had hitch-hiked before.

I talked about Meigs County. Yes, it was bad. A dozen other counties were just as bad. What would happen? He

didn't know. Toledo had blown up, as expected, and the League had plenty to worry about in Lucas County alone.

Because of the relative militancy of the Unemployed League leadership and the experience and ability of its overworked organizers scores of strikes of employed workers both in Ohio and elsewhere have been virtually led and frequently won by the unemployed allies of the strikers.

In the great textile strike, the North Carolina Unemployed League formed the "flying squadrons" and in some sections closed down as many shops as did the union. The building trades workers, the pottery workers, the garment workers in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere, the miners have all formed working alliances for joint action with local unemployed units.

Probably the most outstanding accomplishment of the Ohio Unemployed League was its success for a long period in 1933 and 1934 in stopping practically all evictions of unemployed in the city of Columbus. This struggle was climaxed by a street riot in which the police charged into a "street home" which the League members had set up by way of dramatizing the plight of the unemployed.

CWA, FERA, and now WPA—all the alphabetical relief measures of the New Deal have been greeted with strikes. Because of the WPA's definite attack upon the wage standards of the employed, it would seem likely that the alliance of organized labor and the various unemployed organizations will be strengthened by the President's latest measure.

7

YOWZIR: AN EPISODE

BY the time I reached Ohio I had begun to experience a certain amount of shell-shock, incident to my several encounters with the chaotic conflicts embodied in Mr. Roosevelt's truce. I felt neither young nor bitter, but a little old, and in need of some of that irrational, militant optimism with which youth is supposed to fortify the flagging energies of age. Accordingly, I accepted with alacrity when a liberal professor at one of Ohio's numerous denominational colleges suggested that I visit his campus and talk to his students. This was feasible, first because my radical reputation was fortunately obscure, and second, because the president and faculty of this particular college, while predominantly conservative, were militant defenders of the principles of academic freedom.

It was after nine o'clock in the evening when I arrived at the professor's house, where I was greeted by a small group of the more radically minded students and instructors. They were cordial and intelligent but I confess I was a little dashed by the impersonal, debating society manner they employed in discussing matters of the most profound personal import, not so much to me, but to them. They knew that most of them were going to graduate into unemployment, or at best into wretchedly ill-paid, insecure, and uncreative jobs. The débris of the depression was all

about them; a short distance from the campus, relief workers were making chairs in one of the idle factories taken over by Ohio Production Units, Inc.; a big herd of drought cattle was pastured just outside the town; a few months before the Unemployed League in Columbus had been stopping evictions and fighting pitched battles with the police, and shortly afterward the Auto-Lite strike had blown Toledo wide open. But most of them—not all, there were two or three exceptions—viewed all these phenomena with a detached equanimity that both repelled and frightened me. They could not seem to understand that I and other radicals and even liberals who do not feel that they can afford to be tired, turned with a hope akin to desperation to the youth of the colleges for the fresh courage and vitality, the tough rebelliousness needed to take over the civilization and shape it creatively.

I was stupid to expect anything of the sort, of course. I had lost the perspective of my own college days. The next morning I regained some of it, for I saw them en masse—nearly fifteen hundred students assembled for the morning chapel exercises. They were indeed marvelously young, healthy and good-looking; dozens and scores of beautiful girls and handsome, athletic boys. They were thrilling to look at, and I suppose they would have driven me mad if I had had the job of trying to teach them. Young white Indians, quite unaware that the hunting ground of the American middle class is ravaged, that the circle of exploitative privilege is steadily contracting, that the subsidies available for the arts and sciences are withering; that the old world is dying, and the birth of the new a matter for hope rather than assurance.

A week later I was driving out of Toledo en route to Detroit. Soon I sighted a small, dapper figure with a brief case, a bag, and a business-like thumb. It turned out to be a collegian, or rather, a college graduate with a B.A., a profession, and even a philosophy of life.

"Where do you want to go—to Detroit?" I asked.

"Yowzir!" he replied with enthusiasm, and proffered me a monogrammed cigarette case.

He was about five feet three, I judged; rather daintily built, but not effeminate; the features small, the eyes thoughtless, incurious, and yet somehow sharp; the clothes neat, distinctly collegiate, but not extreme.

After exchanging briefly the usual amenities of the road, I proceeded to find out about him. He was the son of a carpenter in a middle-western town. His lower-middle-class mother had sweated and sacrificed to put him through high school and college; she had wanted him to become, not a carpenter, but a "gentleman": a doctor, lawyer, or at the very least an accountant or minor business executive. He had "made" the less swanky fraternities in both high school and college; he had participated ardently in the extra-curricular activities—had managed teams and business-managed school publications. During vacations he had made a little money at what was to become, after graduation, his profession.

What was that profession? He was a "culture-bearer." He didn't say that, of course. What he said was that he traveled from city to city selling block subscriptions for McGladden publications: *Blue Romances, Stewed Stories, Flicker Fancies,* and *Fraternity*—or was it *Equality*?

I was greatly interested. Where had he been? How had

he found business? Who read the McGladden publications? I was familiar, as who is not, with the promotion advertising of these publications. According to their circulation manager they are read by the Sweeneys: the substantial working people of America, men, women and children. It is the Sweeneys, or so runs the argument, who do the bulk of the buying, and it is the Sweeneys that you must advertise to if you have developed a new, low-priced household gadget, or a new beauty aid, or a new packaged corruption of the natural virtues of wheat and corn. There are an astonishing number of Sweeneys, it appears, and their virtues are both massive and readily exploitable.

Yowzir, who appeared to be fairly shrewd about his business, gave me some interesting data about who these Sweeneys are, where they are located, and how you catch them. Many of them were workmen and workmen's wives and daughters. But many more of them, most of them in fact, were white-collar workers, especially typists and shop girls.

This was indicated by the relative state of the market in different cities. Washington, averred Yowzir, was a Lulu, because of its huge concentration of white-collar workers. The Brain Trust had indeed been a godsend to McGladden. In the intervals of typing the variegated and kaleidoscopic "plans" spawned by the New Deal secretariat, the stenographers extracted copies of *Blue Romances* and *Psychical Culture* from their desks and devoured them passionately. They paid for these publications on the installment plan, being hounded thereto by Yowzir and his ilk.

Washington was marvelous; Columbus had been pretty

good. All the state capitals, in fact, were likely hunting grounds for the McGladden boys. Detroit, he thought, would be fair because of its heavily staffed relief apparatus. What you steered clear of was the broke industrial towns, and especially the slum districts of these towns. The real poor didn't read McGladden publications. They didn't read anything except an occasional newspaper. This was especially true since the depression. It appeared, in fact, that because of the withering of the market, McGladden, like any other manufacturer of merchantable commodities, was engaged in trading up into the middle class; there was still some money and still some interest in romance left there; none in the segregated Fifth Estate of the unemployed.

Was it profitable business, I asked.

Not so good. His commissions sounded extravagant, but they were eaten up by travel, even though this was subsidized by passing motorists. Occasionally he had to write home for money and the carpenter usually came through, although he didn't have much work now; he was getting old. (So the carpenter also subsidized McGladden, I reflected, being doubtless rewarded by the sense of having made a vicarious sacrifice in the interest of culture. Also the state, which had educated the carpenter's son.)

I did not wish to think badly of Yowzir. After all, he had been to college. Maybe this profession of his was just a survival expedient, like stealing fruit or picking up coal along the tracks. Did he like the McGladden publications, I asked? Did he read them?

"Yowzir, I'll tell the world I read them. They're some swell books. Wait a moment!"

Helpless to prevent him, I watched while he opened his suitcase, extracted samples of all the McGladden publications, and presented them to me.

My gorge was steadily rising, but there was still something to be learned from Yowzir, and I hung grimly to my task.

What did his college professors think of the McGladden publications, I asked. They had never mentioned them, but that was different. You read only classical authors in college—Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, Hugo, Washington Irving. It was all pretty dead stuff, but he had worked hard and got C's in his courses. The McGladden publications were something else again; you got a kick out of reading them—snappy, up-to-date stuff.

I continued to explore his academic past. He had studied French, but couldn't speak a word of French and aside from the required reading in his courses, had never read a book in French. He had displayed some talent for mechanical drawing, but hadn't followed it up—there was no money in that.

Enough of Yowzir as student, I reflected. What about his personal life? Casually, I asked him what he did for women on the road.

Immediately that extraordinarily trivial face assumed an expression of wise and sophisticated virtue. He never went with prostitutes, he assured me. He would not lower himself, aside from the chances of infection. Anyway, if you used your head, you didn't have to pay for it. There was usually some hot baby in one of the offices he visited who, if you went about it rightly, would be willing to lift a skirt for a friend.

I almost hit a post that time. The little pimp! So he was subsidized at that point too, was he? He didn't even have the grace to pay for his sexual pleasures. I studied his face, and if there was an atom of decent humanity in it, I was unable to see it.

I had one more question, however. What did he think of the prospects of business recovery? What was the world coming to anyway?

I should have asked him that sooner, for when he answered, I saw that he esteemed himself to be something of an authority. He drew a few grave puffs on his cigarette and then issued his pronouncement.

"Buddy," he said, "I'm telling you things won't get much better until we have another war. I've traveled all over this country and that's my judgment. A war would straighten us out in no time. Everybody'd have jobs—there wouldn't be any more labor troubles like what they had in Toledo. And if there were, the troops would put the heat on those red agitators quick enough. I went to the R.O.T.C. camp myself this summer, and that's what all the boys were saying. Yowzir! What this country needs is another first class war."

The pompous, adolescent voice ceased speaking. I didn't look at him. I had seen enough of him. Suddenly I saw opening ahead an appalling vista. There would be another war, and this wretched little whippersnapper would be an officer in the army. He would be giving orders to working men, men a thousand times his superiors in brains, in brawn, in character—men like those Meigs County miners.

I stopped the car in the middle of a deserted stretch of scrubby pine land.

"Get out!" I said.

He hesitated, and I extracted a monkey wrench from the side pocket of the car.

I left Yowzir standing by the side of the road, his face contorted with bewilderment and indignation. His mouth was open, but he hadn't dared to curse after me. . . .

Well, Yowzir was made in America, and America will have to pay the price of having made him.

DETROIT AND CHICAGO

8

DETROIT: THE CAPITAL OF MOBILIA

IN Detroit I heard about a labor journalist who kept some files.

I looked him up and was so delighted when I saw the impressive size and orderly arrangement of his files that I plunged into them with scarcely a look at the man who had put them together. When I came up for air, I saw that the man himself was even more interesting than his data. He was that rare and extremely valuable type—a scholar in the labor movement. Few universities can boast better research men than instinct and natural aptitude had made of this patient, bald, fifty-year-old, self-educated sheet-metal worker. In fact I have seldom seen files that contained less lumber and more information.

He had news clips concerning all the automotive strikes for the past three years, and pointed out that many strikes never made the capitalist newspapers at all. Even after a big walk-out there was usually a hiatus of two or three days and then a riot before the employer-dominated Detroit press would admit that anything had happened.

What had happened since the President's automobile settlement and the setting-up of the Automotive Labor Board?

The speed-up and stretch-out had been instituted on a scale unprecedented in his thirty-year experience of the

industry. Here the data was in the form of letters written by automotive workers to labor editors, of which I reproduce the following specimens:

On the motor assembly line at Ford's, production used to be 1,300 motors for the day and afternoon shifts. About the middle of March, when a general strike of the auto industry seemed about to start, production was cut down to 900, without reducing the working force. For the first time in years we were able to work almost like normal human beings. Just as soon as William Collins and the other A. F. of L. officials did their dirty work in having the strike called off, not only were many Ford workers sorely disappointed, but Henry himself felt overjoyed. Production in our department was stepped up to 1,450 for the two shifts and three workers out of 37 were laid off.

This, from a Chevrolet worker, is even more enlightening:

Chevrolet workers got the benefits of the agreement signed at Washington without any loss of time. On the day the terms of the settlement were announced, we were speeded up to a new high record in the axle department, plant no. 3. On that day we turned out 1,500 jobs instead of the usual 1,000 or 1,100. The fellows are pretty sore about the new wage increase which is scheduled to go into effect April 1. This increase is going to cut wages for many of us if we go on the 36 hour week. My own pay check will be minus $3.15.

The following excerpt from another letter by a Chevrolet worker contributes a macabre detail:

I am working in department no. 16, the press room, midnight shift. We are supposed to use tongs in working on these

presses, but they make us use our hands because we can work faster. If the press repeats, good-by, hands.

This made interesting supplementary reading in connection with the pronouncement of Mr. Alfred P. Sloan, issued while I was in Detroit, concerning the labor policy of General Motors. Stripped of its elaborate verbiage, what Mr. Sloan said was that General Motors intended to stick to its company union policy. By implication, the statement meant that the company union would be the weapon which General Motors would use in fighting both the unions and government interference under Section 7a. This was, of course, strictly in line with the Young company union plan which figured in the hearings before the National Steel Labor Board which I had attended in Pittsburgh.

All the union organizers were driven mad by the difficulty of injecting the most elementary principles of unionism into the heads of the migratory Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas mountaineers who, since the depression, had drifted into Detroit during the production season and out again when production shut down; they constituted a tougher nut to crack than the foreign-born Slavs and the Negroes. Religion was a factor; the mountaineers were fundamentalists, like many of the native Michigan farmers who had become automotive workers.

In October, 1934, Michigan carried 700,000 persons on its relief rolls at a cost of about $6,000,000; that meant that between 20 and 30 persons were receiving "welfare aid" for each individual receiving such aid before 1929. Seventy-five per cent of this total were unskilled laborers;

skilled labor accounted for 18 per cent. The relief scale, although everywhere admittedly inadequate, was relatively high in Detroit and incredibly low in some of the rural counties. The upper peninsula of Michigan was described by competent observers as "one big poor house," with 80 per cent of the population on relief in some of the copper, iron, and exhausted lumber counties, most of which were broke before the depression.

It would have taken months of digging to get to the bottom of this human compost heap. I knew there was a bottom untouched by union organization, a bottom which even my labor scholar knew little about. I knew that relief, wage, and speed-up statistics gave a very inadequate picture. What was really important was how these people lived, loved and died, what they thought and felt, what they read, what they did with their "leisure."

A woman union organizer supplied a few fragmentary clews. She came off a picket line, had dinner with us, and didn't need to confess her state of physical and mental exhaustion. She told the usual story of unspeakable wage and work conditions in the restaurant industry, of ubiquitous rackets and intermittent police harassment. What were her people like? Oh, they were just working girls, mostly of foreign descent. They were in the automotive shops when there was work, otherwise anything they could pick up. How did they manage to live on their wages? They didn't; some of them hustled a little—surprisingly few and what if they did? What did they read? The sexy pulps and slicks if anything. Yes, the McGladden sheets. She gave me some case histories and later I obtained others from social workers; also some even better ones from bar-

tenders, a philosophic race of men, and frequently well-informed.

In Detroit, more clearly than anywhere else in America, one sees the bare bones of the cultural nightmare we Americans have dreamed for ourselves, believing, in our greedy haste, our barbaric innocence, that it was a thing we could live by and with; that human life could flourish as a kind of parasitic attachment to an inhuman, blind, valueless process, in which money begets machines, machines beget money, machines beget machines, money begets money.

It was and is a mad notion. Europeans, more sophisticated in the verities of social madness than ourselves, have given this mad notion a name: Fordismus. Where else in the world, and at what other period of history could a lean, pale, fixed-eyed pioneer mechanic have imposed his rule of thumb economics, his small-town morality, upon a whole society? Yet it is easy to see how it happened. When Mr. Ford and the automobile were young, there was no organic culture to form and shape him; Ohio was changing from a natural wilderness to an industrial wilderness but it was still essentially a boom camp. There was nobody to wash his ears and make them listen to something beside himself and the powerful, if mad promptings of his genius, nothing to slap his ears back and cure him early of Fordismus. So he had his infantile, willful way; he dug the channel, others followed and helped him, and the final surge of power back of the American gold-rush flowed through it. Mr. Ford has had Fordismus all his life. He will die of it, and I think the society will die of the same thing.

The River Rouge plant is like a mechanically gifted child's dream of heaven, and every day thousands of wide-eyed American children of assorted ages, from seven to seventy, throng the gates of this heaven for to admire and to see.

These tourists saunter along the platform beside the assembly line, just as a week before, perhaps, they had sauntered along the boardwalk above Niagara Falls. It is indeed an equivalent phenomenon. It has almost the same natural grandeur and human irrelevance. One could almost smell an acrid, electronic mist arising from the motors, like the mist that rises above the Falls.

The tourists didn't know each other, or speak to each other—they were the heterogeneous, atomic middle-class drift of a continent. The workmen who struggled frantically to keep up with the implacable crawl of the belt conveyors—they too barely knew each other. They were the labor drift of a continent, here today, gone tomorrow, unified by no traditional skills or craft disciplines, a potpourri of races and religions. They were merely the minimum ingredient of man-power necessary to the manufacture of mobility, and as the process of technological rationalization advanced, they would know less and less about what they were doing and why. They were a part of the nightmare and those who watched it were a part of the nightmare. We are all a part of the nightmare.

Three years ago Diego Rivera waddled along that platform beside the conveyor belt. His half-Spanish, half-Indian eyes were wide open and not dreaming. He left the record of what he saw in the Detroit Art Museum, and a few centuries hence, I suspect, those frescoes may sup-

ply more comprehensible data to the archæologists than anything else that will be left of Fordismus. Some of the tourists also go to see the murals. They don't understand them. They are vaguely worried by the half-concealed arrogance of Rivera's knavish ironies, but also, I think, vaguely soothed by the subtle infection of art. They are exposed to a reality of a higher order than the materials it uses and shapes, and unconsciously they are affected.

Detroit specializes in the manufacture of mobility for the continent—indeed for the planet. For all practical purposes—and Detroit respects only practical purposes—it makes comparatively little else. So that Detroit must import the other requisites of a culture. Other centers specialize in some of these things and they are necessary to the accomplishment of Detroit's appointed task. Hollywood specializes in the manufacture of the soothing, narcotic dreams of love, of riches, of powerful, untamed egos in which the slaves of the assembly line or the punch press can take refuge from the nightmare of technological mass production of mobility. In New York, NBC and Columbia specialize in the manufacture of cheerio radio optimism, pre-barbaric dance rhythms, and commodity fetishism intoned by unctuous announcers. In New York also McGladden puts the dream on the printed page, with some special colorations and perversions of reality, as I discovered when I read the "books" Yowzir had left in my car.

These specialized mass producers of dreams supply the major unifying coördinates of the American culture. It is a makeshift, pioneer arrangement, but being in a hurry, like all pioneers, it was the best we could do; also, it was good business. (I do not mean to ignore the culture-

product of isolated religious sects and old-world communities, or the vestigial function of the Protestant and Catholic churches as culture-makers and culture-bearers, but point out that these influences are relatively without force and effect.) Being good business, the specialization in the mass-production of a mass-culture, seemed valid per se—was it not demonstrably what the people wanted? So that by a specialized, heavily capitalized, highly speculative and technologically advanced system of dream-manufacture, we have unified as best we could our big family of pioneers. For the workers, at least, there are no other unifying bonds except the commonly endured miseries of irregular and insecure employment, of meaningless, minutely specialized and frantically speeded-up tasks; of prostitution, sickness, starvation, and death. For the privileged classes, there is participation in the dream and, always, emulation—the cultural equivalent of the accelerating belt line.

9

SCHEHERAZADE SWEENEY AND THE AMBASSADOR

THE sign back of the bar read:

WYZOR ZOMANI ORZIZAZIZ ANZO FUORZIZ.

"It's Polish, isn't it?"

The bartender finished polishing the last glass and regarded the stranger tolerantly.

"No, it ain't Polish," he said. "It means, 'We don't cash checks.' "

The stranger sighed and put a coin on the bar beside his glass.

"It's a good check. You know the McGladden publications—*Blue Romances, Stewed Stories, Psychical Culture Magazine—*"

"Yes, but I don't know you, brother. And even if I did—. Not in this town. Not in Detroit."

The stranger turned to the chunky blonde girl beside him.

"His honor doesn't know me. Excuse it, Scheherazade. I'm the ambassador from the Caliph of Moronia to the Court of St. Mobilia, and he doesn't know me. Come on, baby, let's go back to the booth. We gotta have a conference."

"I love nuts," said Scheherazade. "It's my weakness. You talk swell. I bet you're a writer, or something."

The ambassador drained his glass. "Something," he said morosely. "The conference will please come to order. Business before pleasure. What are you, Scheherazade—Miss Sweeney, I beg your pardon, Scheherazade Sweeney. What were you, I mean, before you were a punch press operator at Gurnstedt's?"

The ambassador closed his eyes. You could see better that way. And hear. Detroit is quiet as a village after midnight. Ford's River Rouge plant, Briggs' Body, Fisher Body—all the automotive plants are miles from the center. And the night life had withered since the depression. A few dance halls, a movie theater housed in an abandoned opera house, a few prostitutes drifting in and out of saloons like this one. Half a dozen blocks south there were none at all. The police kept that part of the town clean.

At the Hotel Statler the Junior League was giving a Charity Circus. Débutantes riding bareback; General Motors big shot with a whip taming a Ford big shot as the lion. Rotarian cut-up as the wild man in the side show. Perfectly killing and all for charity. Detroit could take it. We will share.

This sort of thing had gone on, and would go on, the ambassador reflected, in spite of what happened to the Detroit banks, in spite of what happened to Detroit real estate, in spite of what happened to the automotive workers. It was going on tonight in spite of all that had happened during the preceding four years. What had that big shot in the Fisher building told him? Detroit had lost about a billion dollars—on paper at least. Grass was growing in the streets of the suburban developments that sprawled out twenty and thirty miles beyond the city

limits. Grass-grown streets and groggy gateposts; in places tractors were dragging plows right through the road metal, plowing up the ground for corn and potatoes. Eighty per cent of the local architects and construction engineers were unemployed.

Detroit was withering—but was it? Ford was putting up a new $5,000,000 addition to his plant. Another group of automotive capitalists was building a new steel plant embodying new processes, a 50 per cent increase in man-hour productivity; that would certainly put a crimp in Gary and Pittsburgh.

This was the capital of Mobilia, a civilization conceived in motion, built on wheels, and dedicated to the principle that everything and everybody must move faster and faster. The machine was the state and the state was the machine; all power to the turbines, the electric furnaces, the new photo-electric cell and 'tron contrivances that counted and sorted, warned, stopped and started, so much more accurately, so much more intelligently than men or women.

Of course, the machine expelled excrement: metal scrap, paper scrap—known as "securities"—human scrap known as the unemployed, of which the capital of Mobilia at the moment acknowledged 130,000; from twenty to thirty people were receiving "welfare aid" for every person receiving such aid in 1929.

A voice cut through this haze of reverie. The ambassador started and rubbed his eyes. Oh, yes, this was one of them, a constituent of the Caliph, undoubtedly; one of his readers, one of his spiritual charges. What was she saying?

"You're a funny guy. Do you realize you've been sitting there like a dummy for five minutes? And you ain't tight. I could tell if you was tight. You ain't half as tight as I am, even. Come on, big boy, snap out of it."

The ambassador regarded his new acquaintance vaguely. Peroxide blonde. About thirty. Thick arms. Painted fingernails, but heavy callus on right hand. Eyes small, puzzled, half plaintive, half shrewd—the female simian look. Mouth childish, greedy rather than sensual.

"I'm sorry," said the ambassador. "No, I'm not tight, Scheherazade. You're a good girl and I like you. You were going to tell me what you were before you were a punch press operator at Gurnstedt's."

It was Scheherazade's turn to become dreamy. Head back, eyes half-closed. The woman of mystery; a burlesque of a burlesque. One of Cecil DeMille's constituents also, reflected the ambassador.

"I'm not a good girl. Not now. I got my snootful of being good. I'm hard now. Men don't fool me any more. I know them; I get what I want out of them and they get what I want to give 'em."

She paused. The cigarette hand described sophisticated circles.

"I was only sixteen. I fell in love with a fellow in my home town. I'm a Southern girl. My grandfather stood with Lee at the surrender." (What, with that face! reflected the ambassador.)

"I was ready to do anything for this fellow. He promised to marry me. He got my cherry. He knocked me up."

Not precisely the accepted language of the Caliphate, reflected the ambassador. But the music was the same.

"Did you have the baby?" he asked gently.

"Yes, and in three weeks that poor baby was dying of diphtheria. . . . The fellow wouldn't come near me. He was scared. He was scared of his folks. I had never drunk before, but I took two tumblers of moonshine and drank them straight down. Then I went over to his house and dragged that fellow out of bed. I said: 'You're going to see your baby before he dies.' The poor little thing was the image of his father and I was bound he'd see it.

"I dragged him out of the house and put him in a cab. When we got there the baby was dying. The fellow fainted dead away. He went out like a light. I said: 'I'm going to make you suffer the way you made me suffer.' He fell on his knees. He kissed my dress. He said he'd marry me. He said he'd slave for me."

The waitress paused expectantly outside the booth. The ambassador held up two fingers. They were alone in the café by this time. The bartender was yawning. The rumble of the street was fading. Mobilia was going to bed.

"The baby died, and his people, they done everything for that child. They certainly laid him out fine. They give him a wonderful burial.

"Then I decided I'd make him love me the way he used to before he knew he'd got me in trouble. He fell for me again, harder than before. But I was cruel to him. I made him want me all the time, and then I wouldn't let him.

"He got drunk. He drank more and more so he was drunk all the time. His mother come to me and begged me

on her knees to save him. I wouldn't. I was hard-hearted. I said, 'Let him suffer the way he made me suffer.'

"Then one night I went into a joint and found him sitting there drunk. I got soft-hearted. I took care of him. I nursed him. I kept the liquor away from him and he got better. When he was well he cried like a baby and begged me to marry him. I said: 'Don't you ever see me or speak to me again.' "

There were circles under the eyes of Scheherazade. The shoulders drooped. The mouth was tortured. A perfect close-up.

"Was that all?" murmured the ambassador. "How about the fellow in Zanesville, the fellow that got you drunk and married you?"

Scheherazade sat up straight and dropped her cigarette.

"Say, big boy, who do you think you are? You know a lot, don't you? I thought you was a gentleman. I know millionaires in this town, know them personal. And you better believe I don't let 'em get fresh with me. I wouldn't even let them know I'm broke. They buy me a dress for a party, maybe, but— Say, who do you think you are?"

The ambassador pointed to her left hand. "Why do you wear a ring if you don't want people to know you are married? Excuse it, Scheherazade, I was just kidding."

"Oh!" The girl glanced at the ring. "Well, I'm not married now. I just wear that—well—"

"I know, Scheherazade. You wear it to keep fresh guys like me in their place. Don't get sore. Come on, your drink is waiting for you."

The girl hesitated, then drank. "Well, it wasn't Zanesville, wise guy. It was Lima. But he did get me drunk. I

didn't want to marry him. But he had a license and he got me drunk, and he was drunk, and we was married.

"Do you know how long that marriage lasted? Nine weeks. I worked and he worked. I made $15 a week. We had as nice an apartment as you ever seen, five rooms, swell furniture, Frigidaire, radio, everything.

"One day I was sick and come home in the afternoon. The door didn't open. It was locked on the inside with the chain. I called the landlord. I said: 'Break down that door,' and he done it.

"That fellow and another girl was drunk in bed. They was as naked as young birds. They didn't have a feather on. I sat down to the telephone, called up the station, called a cab. Then I packed my clothes and took the train back home. He got a divorce. Cost him a hundred dollars. Since then I'm cruel. I don't trust nobody."

The ambassador beckoned to the waiter and paid the bill.

"O.K., Scheherazade," he said. "Tell me one thing. Do you have any friends?"

"What do you mean, do I have any friends? I know millionaires in this town, know them personal. I don't let them know I'm broke, I—"

"Yes, I know. I mean friends who do know you're broke. People you worked with. How long have you been out of work?"

"Three months."

"Who's been paying the rent?"

Scheherazade inhaled deeply, extinguished her cigarette; then, with the aid of her vanity case, made certain repairs and revisions of her make-up.

"Well, big boy, you give me three dollars when we first set down together."

The wall mirror of the booth gave back the reflection of a posturing geisha; opposite her a dark young man who bleakly regarded his own melancholy image.

"Why not?" said the ambassador. "The caliph gave me fifty dollars for that yarn of yours, minus a few additions and improvements. God, how many times have I gone upstairs with the caliph. . . . Don't mind me, Scheherazade. I'm just a nut and I'm trying to think. Do you suppose, Scheherazade, that there is any way we could manage to be friends?"

The girl patted his hand. "Of course, honey. I'm a sport. You been nice to me. You'll be surprised."

The ambassador took note of the thick arms; the skin of the hands a little withered already—she must have been a laundry worker too at some time. At that moment, if the ambassador had chanced to look at his reflection in the mirror he would have seen an expression akin to horror. . . . Scheherazade was making preparations to leave.

"Wait a moment, Scheherazade," he said desperately. "Have another cigarette. Look, three dollars won't pay the rent. Here's another couple of bucks. Sit still a moment. I want to think."

The girl tucked the bills in her stocking, lit her cigarette, and regarded him curiously.

"Jeez, you're a funny guy. Here I'm all set to be nice to you and you want to think. . . . Nice, though. You know, I've found it's sometimes the smartest guys that talks the craziest. What's your line, big boy? I bet you make plenty of dough."

But the ambassador was again lost in reverie. What had the district organizer said? It was possible, though difficult, to get them to fight the bosses; even the women. But it was almost impossible to fight the movies, the radio, the pulp magazines—the caliph. That was why he was working so hard with the theater group, the school, the Saturday night socials. But it was difficult to hold them. And it would get worse, not better. What had Trotsky said in pointing out the danger of delay and compromise in France: "With the further inevitable decay of capitalism, the proletariat will not grow and reënforce itself, but will decompose, constantly increasing the army of the unemployed and slum-proletariat."

That was what was happening right here under his eyes. It was happening in every city he had visited. It was like a plague, starting in the slums and spreading outward. Its victims, most of them, did not even know the name of the disease from which they were suffering; did not know its causes, let alone its treatment and cure. The word "despair" did not describe their condition. Despair implies consciousness and they were too far gone for that. An amorphous mass, existing only as a macabre burlesque of the solemn pronouncements of liberal statesmen and reformers. What was Detroit? A permanent hysteria of motion—an inhuman, mechanical bankruptcy, without any human receivership in sight.

And what was he? A cleverer worm, saved from physical suffering by a gift of agile parasitism, but afflicted with the disease of consciousness; miserable now, because he couldn't infect that gross, animal flesh opposite him with the same disease, could not possibly convey to her his ver-

sion of reality. But what if it had been possible? If she could have known, if it were possible to make that bewildered creature understand, in what rôle could he present himself—he with his crocodile plea for "friendship"? Had he not himself doped her, betrayed her ten times more than she had been betrayed imaginatively by those mythical story-book lovers she had bought at the newsstand? Why had she embraced these myths? To dignify her degradation; to compose, out of the trash of syndicated day dreams, a histrionic personality with which to confront, not unbravely, a reality too impossibly cruel to admit to consciousness, let alone struggle with. As a part of his service to the caliph he had betrayed her once. Would he not be betraying her again—worse than she had ever been betrayed by the real lovers she had undoubtedly had, under God knows what pitiable circumstances—if he insisted upon dragging her into the world of reality, the world of strikes, of mass stultification and mass starvation, of war, of revolution aching in the womb of history?

He had a sudden sadistic impulse. To hell with it. He would sleep with this woman, beat her, torture her. Her flesh at least was real, and he would make that flesh suffer. . . .

The ambassador felt a hand on his brow. It was soft, even humanly feminine and kind.

"You're tired, big boy," said the girl. "Hadn't I better take you home?"

Under the street lamp at the corner the ambassador took both of the girl's hands in his. They were warm, muscular. The woman was all right. And the calluses were real.

"Good night, Scheherazade," said the ambassador. "Remember, you've got a date with me at the hall Saturday night. Don't forget. You've got the address."

The hands pressed his, and stirred as if with an impulse to embrace him.

"Then you're not coming home with me?"

"Not tonight."

The girl stared at him under the street light, her nearsighted eyes straining painfully in simple animal curiosity.

"You certainly are a funny guy. What if I don't show up?"

The ambassador shrugged.

"O.K., big boy. You're a nut all right. But I like you. I'll be there."

For a moment the ambassador watched the handbag swinging beside the heavy buttocks as the girl crossed the square and disappeared down a side street.

It was four o'clock in the morning. The street cars had stopped running, there were no taxicabs in sight, and anyway, he reflected, he was short of money. In a half hour he reached the ancient building that housed the Universal Brotherhood of Relief; formerly a brothel, celebrated as the "house of wonders," it now housed a collection of wobblies, labor organizers, and miscellaneous employed and half-employed workers who had clubbed together to reduce living expenses.

In the washroom he encountered the district organizer, who had been up all night attending meetings and arranging strike plans.

"How's it going, Mike?" said the ambassador.

The district organizer yawned. "Tough," he said. "And getting tougher. The boys are bound to be ready for something soon, though. The axle department at Mobillac hit a new high yesterday—1,500 jobs as against Tuesday a week ago. Is it a speed-up! Maybe that'll teach those damned hill-billies what they're up against. And I hear something is likely to start again in Toledo. If Toledo comes through we can bust it wide open here, and I don't mean maybe."

The ambassador meditated. "Need any dough?"

The district organizer laughed hollowly. "Listen to the guy. He asks me if I need any dough. . . . Say, is this a phony, or are you good for it?"

"McGladden's good for it," said the ambassador, as he endorsed the check. "You can get somebody to cash it when the bank opens. You don't mind spending McGladden's dough, do you?"

"Hell, I'd spend Dillinger's dough if I could get my hands on it. Say, you must be flush."

The ambassador shrugged.

"I'm pulling out this morning. The town's got my goat. By the way, I picked up a tart in a café last evening. I'm sending her around to the meeting Saturday night."

The district organizer looked blank.

"She said she used to work a punch press at Gurnstedt's."

"Oh, that's different. We've been trying to get into that shop, especially that department."

"You don't mind if she's a tart?"

"Hell, no. What difference does it make? She's broke, probably, and has to hustle a little. None of them like the racket. If she's any good, we can use her—maybe get her a

lousy job. . . . Well, good luck. And thanks. Come and see us again. Good night. I'm dead for sleep."

At an intersection of the highway the ambassador paused to watch the rising sun insert its bland, incurious face between the beautiful silvered smoke stacks of the River Rouge plant. A car roared up and he thumbed it vainly. Well, he reflected, there would be trucks soon—he was bound to catch something. Or a bus, perhaps. He counted the change in his pocket. Less than three dollars. No, not enough for bus fare. And no more checks. No longer, he reflected, would he be able to make his living after the fashion to which he had become accustomed. Curiously, the reflection brought with it a sudden gust of elation. He was broke; would probably continue to be broke. But he was young. A young citizen of Mobilia, a civilization conceived in motion, built on wheels, and dedicated to the principle that everything and everybody must move faster and faster. . . . Well, a truck would come along soon.

10

CHICAGO SKY RIDE

MY first glimpse of that tremendous, fantastic cacophony of steel and stone, of men and machines that is called Chicago, was when I drove into Gary from the east and saw the tall smokestacks of the steel mills pricking the evening sky with their ochre and orchid flames. My last, just before I drove over the Wisconsin line, was a backward look at the Temple of B'hai, its huge yet delicate filagreed dome proclaiming a mystical gospel of Love, which would yet, the B'haists assured me, unite Gary, the Century of Progress, Sam Insull, Al Capone, and the *Chicago Tribune* in a great international symphony of beauty and peace.

Of what lies in between I have only a vague impression: a smell of oil and a swirl of freight yards coming in; a spurt of skyscrapers shooting up out of the tangle of the Loop; art museums rivaling those of Rome and slums surpassing those of Naples; the ducal magnificence of the Gold Coast barricaded on the Lake Shore Drive, with the criminal leer of Little Sicily threatening to leak through at any moment; the Standard-Oil-lubricated, neo-Gothic monasticism of the University, fooling nobody, not even itself; the whole bewildering congeries still held together, more or less, by the tag-end of the pioneer, go-getting drive, and a curious but genuine local patriotism; the Hog

Butcher's appetite for pork still unsated; the Toolmaker still creative and resourceful; the Freight Handler still indomitably bent on keeping things moving. There was an air of startled, bewildered, but still unsubdued youth about the whole city; it seemed too old for the dum-dum farce of Mayor Thompson and the gangsters, but still too young to accept and endure the purgations of tragedy.

Sandburg, alone, has made Chicago more articulate than almost any other American city, but there have been plenty of others: poets, novelists, sociologists, economists, historians, a swarm of able newspaper people. I met some of them, listened hard, and hereby tender my apologies for learning as little as I did. The town was just too much for me. Anyway, I became infatuated with the Century of Progress—they didn't properly appreciate it, I thought—and kept sneaking off to plunge myself in its crowds and gawk at its innumerable shows.

Gary Interlude

I saw both ends of Gary, the town being divided into two parts: Main Street and the steel mills. The economic pulse of steel is the pulse of Main Street: business is good or bad, depending upon the size of the steel workers' pay envelopes. You'd think, therefore, that the Main Street merchants would be inclined to favor the first serious attempt by the steel workers, since 1919, to bargain collectively for bigger pay envelopes.

Well, they don't. When the steel strike threatened in the spring of 1934, they got together and considered whether or not they should refuse credit to strikers. This,

in spite of the fact that the Main Street landlords had raised rents the moment the curve of steel production went up. The merchants didn't strike against the landlords. They took it—one of them took a 100 per cent increase in the rent of one of his stores. But most of them seemed to be in favor of the steel strikers' taking an average weekly income that keeps most of them at or below the minimum subsistence level at which the Relief Administration supports its clients. Markets? Pushed to the wall, these small business men mutter irritably that they can get along without markets. But the steel workers can't live, let alone buy comforts on what they are getting? Let them wait until business is better.

An Anglican priest told me that a while back he had spoken at a Rotary luncheon in Gary, his subject being the economic and social philosophy of Karl Marx. How did the Rotarians like it, I asked? Not much, he replied. This priest describes himself, not as a liberal, but as an American, a Christian, and a family man. His congregation includes many of the "best people" of the community —steel mill bosses mostly—as well as a percentage of steel workers. It is his duty, he feels, to present to his people the facts of the current social dilemma as he sees them.

What future did he see for America, I asked. A type of industrial feudalism, he thought, probably fascist; even more probably, a war which would stimulate enormously the activity of the Gary steel mills.

He said this at dinner preceding a meeting of the Weekly Forum in the church adjoining. Across the table sat the local rabbi, who had organized this Forum. The rabbi was very enthusiastic about Lewis Corey's *The Decline of*

American Capitalism. He had carried it all around town, trying to get somebody to read it. Nobody had.

A few days before I had attended another meeting in Gary, at the headquarters of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers. Newspaper reporters are not very popular at that end of Main Street. The first thing the district organizer did was to tell the meeting there was a reporter in the house, and that he was requested to come up front so that everybody could have a look at him and watch him take notes. I acceded to the request with utter promptness. The second thing the organizer did was to place a chair beside mine and demand that the company stool pigeon come down front and occupy it. The inference was clear. Fortunately for my sensibilities, the stool pigeon, if present, did not reveal himself.

The meeting was called chiefly to hear the reports of the officers and members who had testified at the hearings of the National Steel Labor Board in Chicago the day preceding, at which the Amalgamated had petitioned for a supervised election in the plant of the Gary Screw and Bolt Company. Similar petitions had been filed during the week affecting other steel plants in the vicinity of Gary. The hearings affected more or less crucially the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers in the Chicago-Gary steel district. But the Chicago papers carried no more than scattered paragraphs concerning them. Under pressure from the Gary locals of the Amalgamated, the *Gary Post-Tribune* devoted a page to the hearing in the Gary Screw and Bolt Company case.

As in the hearings I had witnessed in Pittsburgh, counsel for the Company denied the jurisdiction of the Board,

pending court test. The testimony of the Amalgamated witnesses was similar to that given by the workers in the Duquesne plant of the Carnegie Steel Corporation, with some interesting differences. It appeared that some honest, if naïve steel workers had joined the company union and attempted to secure a restoration of a cut. When turned down by the management, two of the three company union representatives had resigned and joined the Amalgamated.

It further appeared that W. R. Irwin, general manager of the Gary Screw and Bolt Company, was serving on the local Compliance Board, although his own company was not operating under the code and denied the jurisdiction of the NRA Labor Board. But the high point of the hearing came when white-haired Admiral Wiley turned on Ernest S. Ballard, counsel for the Corporation, and declared heatedly:

"Mr. Ballard, the whole steel industry is taking a different position than you do. . . . First, you challenged the Board's authority. You'll find that out soon and thoroughly. You'll find you stand alone. There are a great many developments in this matter that put a new complexion on the whole thing."

Which left the Amalgamated organizers wondering whether the Admiral was bluffing, or really did have some cards up his sleeve. (Later. He was bluffing, and the NRA died.)

In the fifth year of the depression, Chicago's Main Street, which is somewhere in the vicinity of Michigan Boulevard and the Loop, still had a ten-o'clock-in-the-morning air of hustling conquest. It is a man's town; the

steers are slaughtered, the pork packed, and the steel hammered right in the center of the city. It is men who do these things. Men sit in the skyscraper offices and weave the tangled threads of Chicago's financial, industrial and civic destiny. Smartly dressed men, with hard blue eyes and pocket handkerchiefs matching their eyes and their ties, prowl up and down the canyons of the Loop; on business, I suppose, although God knows what business. Also heavy-shouldered harvest hands and lumberjacks drift in and out of the saloons of the shabbier side streets. A man's town; the women are handsomer than those on Fifth Avenue, but less chic and they don't rule the roost.

Business, politics, the extra-legal departments of government operated by the gangsters—all men's games. Chicago politics continues to be incorrigibly and abjectly funny. I was there during the election and was told that the Kelly-Nash machine was bitter at heart, but realistic. "Honest" Harold Ickes—the appellation carries indignant overtones when uttered by local politicians—had so restricted the PWA money spent in Chicago that the boys just couldn't get their fingers on it. The situation was painful and almost without precedent; it was aggravated by the timeliness of the government's prosecution of Samuel W. Insull, with its staggering revelations of financial and political "wizardry."

Under the circumstances, the Chicago bosses considered a modicum of respectability to be politically expedient. Hence the frenzied intensity with which the Kelly-Nash cohorts embraced the New Deal. What with the daily shellacking they were taking from the *Tribune* and the *News,* they had no recourse but to get the New Deal religion and

get it hard, with the expectation that afterward they would get their reward in the form of the usual secular arrangements.

A well-known educator whom I interviewed explained in sociological terms the furious opposition to the New Deal led by the *Chicago Tribune*. Chicago, he pointed out, is still full of rugged individuals on the make. They are both more ambitious and less secure than the corresponding business leaders in Boston and Philadelphia. Hence their loud outcries of "Hands off Business," their objection to the alphabetical government controls, their demands for a balanced budget, etc.

Chicago had about 280,000 families on relief when I was there and was spending about $10,000,000 a month, of which the FERA contributed 75 per cent. The average monthly budget was around $28.00. But these statistics give no picture of what was happening in the slum districts and doubtless still is. A sociologist told me that a recent survey of one of these districts had shown that practically every individual—men, women, and children—was engaged in some form of criminal activity. It even appeared that this form of self-help was preferred to the conventional forms of relief.

The sociologist who contributed this tid-bit was more or less typical in his personal attitudes of the academic social scientists I encountered both in Chicago and elsewhere. They have accumulated vast quantities of valuable descriptive material—Chicago, in particular, under the leadership of Professor Robert Park, has made an extraordinarily rich contribution. But they adhere to Veblen's earlier attitude: they are more interested in what is

happening and in what is likely to happen than in *making* things happen—that they leave to the politicians. It does no good to point out that no science and no art begins and ends with fact-finding; that some sort of social philosophy must guide the collection of facts and control their interpretation and use. Nor was I able to impress anybody with my mild observation that these sociologists were themselves a part of the subject matter of their analyses; that they were citizens as well as sociologists; that if they let the facts stew long enough, some sort of fermented action would ensue—action in which they would have to participate willy-nilly on one side or the other.

I met some distinguished exceptions, but on the whole I concluded that the red-hunters are wasting their time at the University of Chicago. I realize that my testimony is suspect, but I beg to assure Mr. Walgreen, Mr. Hamilton Fish, and others, that these professors are class-conscious in the "right" way—their class being the professional middle class, tied to the academic machinery, which is in turn dominated by conservative government or conservative business. They have excellent minds—in certain minor and inconclusive respects it seemed to me that they had outgrown the radicals intellectually. But the radicals have outgrown them emotionally, which means that the professors will be followers, not leaders, and whites more probably than reds. They are economically comfortable and love their specialized, "objective" and more or less obsolete scholarship. They will move with the process as long as it can make a place for them, keeping their relative positions in the social order of our declining capitalism. The process will do increasing violence to their con-

victions and force them into higher and higher stratospheres of Olympian rationalization. But they are gentle people, pacifists in the larger sense, and they will die rather than act. It is too bad for the radical movement, which will be quite genuinely handicapped if it has to get along without them. It will be too bad for them if they have to die anyway—"objectively," and without acting.

The Exposition

I attended the Century of Progress during its concluding two weeks, so that Mr. Rufus C. Dawes, whom I interviewed, was then in a position to give me, with approximate accuracy, the financial balance sheet of that amazing enterprise. The more I studied those figures, the more I was obliged to conclude that showmanship still pays in America.

Thirty-seven million paid admissions had passed through the gates of the Biggest Show Ever. Eighty per cent of the $10,000,000 Century of Progress bond issue had been or would be paid off—perhaps more; the financial backers of the exposition might possibly break even, which would be an all-time world record. In addition, as Mr. Dawes pointed out, much weight must be given to the indirect benefits to Chicago merchants and landlords; to the gasoline filling stations along the highways leading to Chicago; to a general release of spending stimulated by the exposition.

So much for the financial balance sheet. But the moral benefits, Mr. Dawes insisted, were also important. Mr. Dawes is a genial and likable business man, so I ventured

to jest with him. Was he referring to Sally Rand and the Streets of Paris, I asked? Mr. Dawes had heard that one before and had his answer ready. The Midway, he suggested, bore the same relation to the net purpose and significance of the exposition as football bears to the purpose and significance of our great universities. He was referring to other moral benefits: our morale was very low, and the successful putting over of the exposition under unprecedented difficulties was in itself an act of courage from which both Chicago and the country at large may well have derived moral stimulus and inspiration.

I was obliged to concede some validity to his point. As a job of technical planning and administration the exposition, from beginning to end, was impressive, not to say magnificent. These Chicago business leaders, I reflected, are capable of astonishing tours de force. True, it is possible to contend that the whole idea of the exposition was an evasion of the social and economic dilemma with which Chicago and the country was and is faced. Chicago, as Margaret Ayer Barnes wrote in the *Survey Graphic,* is "a child that would rather give a party like the Century of Progress than wash its own hands and brush its own teeth." But it was a swell party, beautifully organized and efficiently conducted. And it had its genuine values, as I discovered when I went out looking for those moral benefits Mr. Dawes was so eloquent about.

The Hall of Science was, of course, the pièce de resistance of the show. It was big magic, utterly respectable, and completely sanctioned by the mores of all classes and all communions. But the older magic of the church was also represented. "Righteousness Exalteth a Nation," read

the inscription over the Hall of Religion, much smaller, but still impressive, which adjoined the Hall of Science. If the planners of the exposition had been puritanical, or unrealistic, or un-sociological, it would have ended there. But they were none of these things. A few blocks away from the Halls of Science and Religion there began the Midway, which provided in generous measure the oldest magic of all—the magic of sex.

I entered reverently into all three temples and did my best to observe the attitudes of my fellow-worshipers. The science was real, especially the basic science exhibits prepared by the universities and scientific societies. Middle-western farmers paused, studied, and made notes. It was their science, their cultural heritage, and it was undoubtedly very great. Moreover, they and their lives were inextricably caught up in the applications of this science. Yet something was wrong and one saw that they felt it. It was their science, they were a part of it, yet somehow it was being misused and disused. The golden cord of this magic was broken; the pitcher was broken at the fountain. Remembering the twelve million unemployed, the twenty million on relief, the languishing mines and mills I had seen, it seemed to me that this science was like the inert deposit of a glacial drift, dumped on the southern shore of Lake Michigan for crowds of modern savages to marvel over.

In the Hall of Religion I saw the Great Chalice of Antioch—is it the original Holy Grail?—and heard a devout but uninspiring home girl explain its beauties to a thin group of middle-western church women. It and the other treasures of religious art which constituted the exhibit

were both beautiful and fascinating. But the crowds had gone elsewhere. The owner of the exhibit was reported to be disappointed and a little shocked.

There was also, perhaps, something shocking about the fact that the Streets of Paris was relatively successful—it took in a million and a half dollars the first year. I visited this den of iniquity and asked the gate attendant: "Is this just standard carnival stuff?" "Yeah," he replied. "It's a lot of tripe."

This judgment was accurate in a general way. There were, however, some new wrinkles. I found the girl barkers particularly interesting. They were young, not hard-boiled, and their line went something like this:

"Friends, you may be surprised when I tell you that we have had thousands of women in our audiences, and why not? This is a very beautiful dance. It *is* daring; it is very daring. But you may be assured that no woman or girl who goes into this show will be insulted."

While I debated whether or not this would be worth a dime, I was brushed aside by a middle-aged, two-hundred-pound woman who, judging from her appearance, might well have been the famous Old Lady from Dubuque. She sat grimly through a four minute, very mediocre stomach dance. And when she came out, believe it or not, she sat down and had her photograph taken in the middle of the Streets of Paris.

Beating a hasty retreat from this disconcerting phenomenon, I took refuge in the Hall of Social Sciences. Under the direction of Professor E. A. Hooton of Harvard, a small staff of anthropologists were taking anthropometric measures of visitors to the exposition. The customers

thought it was a kind of free phrenology, and the anthropologists rubbed their hands in glee. When I was there they had obtained 6,000 measurements, the biggest series on record. But what I wanted to know was what went on *inside* that old lady's head—that head and all the other 6,000 or 37,000,000 heads. I don't know; nor do the sociologists.

What the sociologists did do was to try to put something into those heads. In one of their exhibits, prepared under the direction of Donald Slesinger of the University of Chicago, they actually went so far as to inform the visitors that there was a depression, although elsewhere the Century of Progress vigorously ignored this fact. In this sociological exhibit a series of well-conceived diorama set forth graphically the sequence of events since 1929. They showed what happened, but not how, or why. If the sociologists understood these latter points, which may be doubted, they were not permitted to tell.

I saved the Sky Ride for the last, which was fortunate, because it gave me a bad time. I was suspicious of the thing from the beginning. I was taken up to the top of the tower in an elevator, had a look at the gondola that was to take me across the lagoon, and was willing to call it enough right there. But the crowd pushed from behind, so I got in, and the thing started.

It was a malicious-looking contraption made of steel plates, with two decks and a dishonest reptilian nose. It creaked and groaned, and every time it passed one of the cable supports it vented an obscene mechanical imprecation that froze my blood. Seldom have I been so terrified. I looked for reassurance in the faces of my fellow pas-

sengers, but they were as solemn as idols. Maybe, I reflected, they were having stomach pangs, too. I tried looking at the lighted panorama of the Century of Progress below me; tried telling myself that it was splendidly, barbarically beautiful, which it was. But the blue, green, and yellow lights made me giddy. I bent my head and closed my eyes. That was worse, because I could not control my thoughts. Anything as fantastically silly as that Sky Ride, I reflected, must logically embody defects of design and workmanship. How would I have felt, what would I have done, I asked myself, if I had been an engineer and had been asked to design, not a useful bridge or turbine, but a Sky Ride?

I had a sudden vision of a demoniac engineer, rubbing his hands and reading with macabre glee a newspaper account of how that gondola had dropped to the bottom of the lagoon with me in it. My wife would read that account too, I reflected, and she would be ashamed. "Progress, indeed!" she would sniff. "Served him right." It would be very much as if I had been found knifed to death in a brothel.

By the time we reached the other side of the lagoon I was bathed in perspiration. The thing stopped and I tried weakly to get out. But no. The door remained closed. I must go all the way back again! . . . I collapsed in a corner of the car and gave myself up for lost.

I assure my readers that this account of my adventure is only slightly exaggerated. As it happened, of course, I had permitted my imagination to malign the sobriety, the integrity, the responsibility of the engineering profession. The gondola got back all right, I crept out, stiffened my-

self with the nearest available stimulant, and returned to my lodgings. There I rapidly made notes for a poem—I would have my revenge in verse! The poem, or the exercise in cadenced prose, whatever it may be called, appears as the next chapter. When it was done I sent a copy to Mr. Rufus C. Dawes, to whom, as you will note, the work was addressed. I received a courteous but non-committal acknowledgment from his secretary.

II

CENTURY OF PROGRESS

1

The Bard Speaks

O Muses, and O, Mr. Rufus C. Dawes,
I was there, it was wonderful, the ache of that wonder is still in my bones.
Tell me, O Muses, and you, O ruler of the feast, Great Khan, and you, Chicago,
What century is this, what capon's treble crow, what snatched shriek of kidnaped souls
Cries "Progress!" the Word made steel?

I was there, I saw Arcturus blink, and the lights went on, and it was beautiful.
I saw the mechanical man, the robot, the Perfect Knight—
Tell me, O Muses, and you, Great Khan, what frightened hands have throned
This chromium boogie-man to scare the crows of destiny?

I was there, O ruler of the feast, Great Khan, the freedom of the press protected me; I heard
The grave voice of the lecturer introducing the Atom in Person, which then uttered
Its customary cosmic nonsense, by which I was not amused, remarking only, "By what right
These merchant-mummers ask the sufferance of the bard?"

This, too, I heard, O Muses, a small voice wailing, ancient and lonely:

They broke me on a Ferris wheel, O God, they wildered me with fans;

The drum thumped, the stomach dancer jerked, they took me for a Sky Ride and I never came back.

I was there, humbly among the last; I heard that voice, I tell you truthfully, I'll tell it

Even to Arcturus, this was what I heard; incapable of perfectness, ungrateful humanity's

The sty in the photo-electric eye, the static curse; I heard:

I was a man, but they broke me on a Ferris wheel, they wildered me with fans;

They stuffed me into a Simmons bed, sleep, my love, and peace attend thee;

They made me into an automobile tire and I rolled away,

Rolled away, rolled away, merrily we roll away. . . .

O Muses, and O, Mr. Rufus C. Dawes,

Forgive the cracked voice of the bard, the soiled hands clutching the departing coat-tails of the Century's most successful impresario, forgive

The blunt fingers plucking strings untuned, the crushed masque of Thalia uttering Melpomene's voice, the comic tears, the bruised laughter.

I was there, humbly among the last; I sat in a corner gnawing the tossed bone of the bard's portion and the electric taste was bitter in my teeth.

Thank you, Mr. Dawes, the free pass was very generous of you, thank you, Mr. Dawes, but—? O, anything, Mr.

Dawes, what you think it's worth. A Century of Progress can afford these archaic human grace notes, like the hog-caller, the hillbilly fiddler, so obviously inferior to the Theremin, and now the poet. What you like, Mr. Dawes, any little thing left over, a burned-out radio tube, or, say, a used star.

2

Jean Baptiste Point DeSaible

(One of the exhibits at the Century of Progress was a reproduction of the cabin which DeSaible, a Santo Domingo Negro, built in 1789 on the present site of the city of Chicago.)

Muskrats in the bayous, and mink, and otter, and beaver,
Water-fowl thick in the reeds by the lake, the fat grouse zooming out of the dune thickets;
Black man, Chicago remembers you, the table is set for you, say:
"Yassah, thank you, sah. Sho' is wonderful"—no, he spoke French.

Wonderful, Jean Baptiste, the tall towers rising like reeds by the bayous, the fleet motors
Scudding like deer along the lake front, the seaplanes zooming
Up from the blue lagoon, and thousands of bathers splashing, calling—
Careful, Jean Baptiste, this is white man's water, the stones fly, the black swimmer sinks, now shots

Ring out, the tribes are swarming, the white, the black—
ho, chiefs, beat the drums!
Illini, Chechaqua, Potawatomi, come, the hunt is on,
there are scalps to be taken!

Chicago remembers you, Jean Baptiste, your cabin is here,
the latch string is out; eat now, O lean
Black ghost, the iron rations of this dream!
Take what is left, black man, the deer are gone, and the
beaver; the geese
Honk lonely and high, the bison, the maned herds gone,
Gone from the fenced prairie, the trapper is trapped, the
black man
Trapped in his hut, the great khan in his tower, the squaw
Gone from the tepee; the pale bucks seek her where the
prurient lights
Mock and reveal, reveal and mock—she wilders them with
fans!

Eat dreams, black man, they are dream-eaters here; the
pounding presses eat
Steel, the furnaces eat coal, breathe fire, but men
Eat dreams; the bitter juice of power
Burns through the night—O black man, the unknowing
stars, will no cry reach?
Be warned, Arcturus! See, in forty years
They pale and scatter, they have trapped
Arcturus in the sky!

Dream-eaters, black man, see, they come,
Millions of dream-eaters, white and black and brown and
yellow,

Murmuring, docile, ox-eyed and wondering; the maned herds
Are gone, Jean Baptiste, the dream-eaters slew them, and now—
Be quiet, black man, let them munch
The iron rations of their dream.

3

Mrs. Wilbur C. Lott

"Migawd, Peg, do you see that old gal?"
Oh, the things you see
In the streets of gay Paree
"You mean the old freighter moving into—"
"For crying out loud, she's going into Dot's booth! Do I *know* her? Does *Dot* know her!"
Oh, such a funny feeling
Goes way up to the ceiling
"No use, I gotta do my act: Friends, you may be surprised when I tell you that we have thousands of women in our audiences. This is a very beautiful dance. It is daring it is very daring but you may be assured no woman or girl whogoesintothisshowwillbeinsulted—IgottabeatitPegtake theticketswillya."
You are just in time
And it only costs a dime
The wages of sin, Mrs. Lott: eight dimes and sixteen eyes, all somewhat inflated; the sin,
The dimes, the eyes. Trapped, Mrs. Lott, yes, sin
Is trapped, made pure, sin too; how virginal

That navel, Dorothy's a good girl, tell it in Gath, tell it in
Wurtsboro, Nebraska, Dorothy's
A good home girl, dance, Dorothy, twirl the beads of the
breasts, Dorothy's
A good girl, eight dimes, three minutes, out this way, you
are
Just in time
And it only costs a dime
Look back, Mrs. Lott, you will not
Be turned to salt; the salt, Mrs. Lott—tell it in Gath, tell
it in Wurtsboro, has lost
Its savor, the bottom's dropped out of the hell business,
Lucifer—
(What's the use of writing it, no publisher would print
what they did to Lucifer.)
"Have your photograph taken, Lady? . . . Just a moment,
I'll write it down, Mrs.
Wilbur C. Lott, Wurtsboro, Nebraska. Thanks, Mrs. Lott,
how's things
Out your way? Yes, it's a good show, gives a lot of girls
A chance to make some dough. Come back soon, tell your
friends comeupnseeussumtime."
You are just in time
And it only costs a dime.

4

Wilbur C. Lott

Mr. Wilbur C. Lott, address Wurtsboro, Nebraska, R.F.D.
3, having made

Five hundred dollars in the not-growing wheat business,
has paid the interest on the mortgage and brought
Two brown hands, minus one finger caught in the binder
in 1920, a sixty-year-old back, a little rheumatic now,
and
Mary, aged ten, Elizabeth, aged eight, Wilbur, Jr., aged
six and
"Be quiet, Junior, your ma said she'd meet us in the Hall
of Religion; listen, that's
The voice of the atom, talking to us: 'Wawk, wawk, blat-
ter, blatter.' "

The voice of the atom, succinct, unintelligibly precise and
scrupulously
Irresponsible, the dance of electrons wildly weaving meas-
ureless measures before no throne:
Chastely, obscenely, these adjectives being themselves
merely fortuitous
Eddies of atoms in the blood; did the astronomers really
see
Arcturus, or was it a clot in blood-shot eyes? But no, the
lights went on, the photo-electric cell
Can't lie; come back, Mrs. Lott, repent, abjure
The weaving hips, the orgiastic quest, the photo-electric
cell
Can't lie, Arcturus is real, and God . . .

God, Mrs. Lott, Mr. Lott, and all the little Lotts—
(I have it on the highest authority; the mathematicians
tried to fit the cube root of Pi square X into Planck's
quantum, and it didn't splice; the chemists, the physi-

cists, the astronomers, all banged their heads together somewhere south of Halley's comet; they all came home trailing ecclesiastical vestments, and God—)
I have it on the highest authority, Mr. Lott, believe me, God
Is a *Christian* Scientist, so the apparent absence of that tenth finger is sheer illusion, to be precise, a mortal error,
And that north quarter will be green with wheat when you get home even though, being a law-abiding citizen and a believer in Progress under the New Deal, you didn't plant it, isn't science wonderful? . . .
"Come, Mary, come, Junior, it's time to meet your ma."

5

The Holy Grail

(The great Chalice of Antioch, possibly the original of the Holy Grail legend, was exhibited, along with the Cathedral silver treasure found with the Chalice and other treasures of ancient religious art, in the Hall of Religion at the Century of Progress.)

"Righteousness exalteth a nation," and power
Craves sanctions beyond itself. Is it true the mechanical man, the robot, the Perfect Knight
Bowed here, braying his electronic "mea culpa, mea culpa"? The foxes
Have their holes, and the Great Chalice of Antioch
Has a room to itself with special admission, ten cents, and

a thin-voiced spinster snatched from a Kansas choir-
loft: "The sacred cup
Enshrined by the Chalice will be the chief interest of—"
Mrs. Lott, hot with hurry, heavy with sin unsinned (Dor-
othy won't tell, Mrs. Lott, and anyway
Was it not Magdalen who drove the leopards in the "King
of Kings"?) Be quiet, Junior—"the scroll
Of the law . . . in the corresponding position we be-
hold . . . in Glory, clad in the imperial robe . . . an
Emperor."

Power, Mrs. Lott, craves sanctions beyond itself; the me-
chanical man will yet
Make terms with the Galilean; wanting miracles, how
Shall the cup be filled? "All thanks
To Thee, Great Stalin"; a century, two centuries, will not
the Georgian bank-robber join
Hathor, and Baal, the Man of Sorrows, that Knavish
Thunderer, Yahweh? (The voice of the atom, the elec-
trons weaving measureless measures before no throne;
"canst thou bind
The cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?")
But the Parthenon, the well-loved marble still
Stands, and the mummied Lenin is peer of Amenhotep,
and you'll find, Mrs. Lott,
A Gideon Bible by your bedside in the tourist home.

6

Savant

Objectively, professor,
The spectacle has merit: the lights, the color, the savage
Music, the changeless multitude changing their bread for the new wine of old magic, the greatness
Indubitable, the brazen century gathering the god-quest of all history into one hoarse-frantic death-cry, "Progress!"

No tribal episode this, professor, no desert Calvary; the electronic cock
Flaps searchlight wings over the night of the inland sea, crows thrice, and the Son of Man
Bleeds on a million crosses. . . .
Parse this, old man
In what language? Measure it with what calipers? Judge it by what law? Stew it in what brain-pan?

Objectively, professor,
You have hives, the cause being the friction of the pedagogical imperative upon the physical rear of the incorrigible ape. When thought
Grows spears, professor, you can do anything with it except sit on it; have a drink,
Professor, you have traveled far
From the cornfields of Kansas that bred you, faithful and kind; you have served
Truth honestly, as you served your cows (Hathor will reward you); have puffed

Yeast in the dough of young minds, have earned
Fame, respect, a free pass to the Century of Progress, including even
The Sky Ride; have a drink, professor, and as for the hives
No caustic will burn them, yours or mine, no syllogism soothe; we are
Half-breeds, professor, our mothers loved
Not wisely but too well; the ghostly betrayer
Strives in our blood, but we are not gods, so drink,
Professor, and not to wisdom; the wise dead
Know all, forgive all, but we are
Not dead, the clock still ticks, we are men, so drink
A toast to battle, that being our portion; not wisdom, not peace; did the ax that hewed
The wilderness, the plow that raped the buffalo sod, did they bring
Peace, the catalytic precipitant, the solving formula? No, they brought the infinite
Sum of all multiplication, the ineluctable quotient of all division; they brought
The sailor home from the sea, the hunter home from the hill, the hawk-minds back
From the farthest perches of thought. . . .

Back, professor, to this narrow house of mirrors where the blind, wanting sight, are saved from seeing
The terror in blind eyes, man facing man, the antagonist unseen, the weapons infinite, the conflict unending, the issue
Never to be known, the victory
Earth-bitter, earth-parturient. . . .

Objectively, professor,
Heads will fall, the great khan's certainly, Mr. Lott and
Mrs. Lott in innocent parenthesis, also
Yours, professor, and mine, the beautiful battle being no
Respecter of persons, and the god-strain being
Recessive though permanent. . . .

Objectively, professor,
Have a drink, the night pales, the morning shows
Spots on the sun, a haze of battle in the east, and mournfully, beautifully, the sound
Of trumpets. . . .

WHAT TIME IS IT IN THE NORTH-CENTRAL FARM-BELT?

12

WISCONSIN: A PROBLEM COUNTY

IF you start from the capitol at Madison, point your car approximately northwest, and drive about a hundred miles, you run right into the middle of the problem which President Roosevelt stated succinctly, if incompletely, in his book, *Looking Forward*:

"Land utilization involves more than a mere determining of what each and every acre of land can be used for, or what crops it can best grow. This is the first step; but having made that determination, we arrive at once at the larger problem of getting men, women, and children—in other words, population—to go along with a program and carry it out."

Quite innocently, and apparently without any prescience of the current New Deal dilemma, nature laid down the physiographic determinants of the problem some fifty or a hundred thousand years ago, when the glacier melted and retreated, leaving a great lake, out of which protruded the sandstone buttes of an earlier geologic epoch. Then the lake, which must have been 250 feet deep in places, broke through its land barriers and flowed out through the Mississippi, leaving what is now known as the sand plain area of central Wisconsin. Much of it is comprised within Juneau County, and Juneau is one of

Wisconsin's "problem counties." It is partly nature's fault, but by no means wholly.

Less than a hundred years ago the northern half of Juneau County must have been a quite lovely expanse of open marshland, alternating with virgin stands of pine timber. It was more or less amicably divided between the Menominee and Winnebago tribes of Indians. They hunted and fished and the Winnebagos, especially, picked cranberries. The marshes were green with the sphagnum moss, in which incredible numbers of wild ducks built their nests. There is comparatively little sphagnum moss now, which is too bad, because the sphagnum is a valuable litter for scientifically managed hen houses; also the obstinate instinct of certain ducks insists on sphagnum moss nests. Less sphagnum, less ducks. Also, less cranberries. The scientific management of the cranberry bog farmers—Wisconsin is third on the list of the cranberry states—today produces only about a fifth of the quantity of cranberries that grew wild fifty years ago. So say, at least, the oldest inhabitants, including Hank Thunder, the ancient Winnebago I met on the road fixing a tire of his delapidated Ford.

Less water, less sphagnum, less cranberries, less ducks—ultimately, of course, less people. Juneau County, before they cut the timber and before they built the 250 miles of drainage ditches that theoretically were to transform this barren, sandy marshland into an agricultural paradise, was a pretty good physiographic base for the wandering tribes of hunting, fishing, berry-picking Indians. Today it is a desert, with the water flowing off through those excellently engineered ditches that so effectively lowered

the water table; with the white sand showing through the shallow layer of deceptively black peat whenever it is stirred by the plow; with the peat itself burned by the fires that consume the struggling second growth of aspen, scrub oak and jack pine with monotonous regularity; with whole villages abandoned and the window panes out of every second house you pass; with here and there a white squatter and his family peering out of a tar-paper shack no bigger than a large outhouse; with the Indians themselves—yes, the ancient Winnebagos, coming back to pick for miserable wages what cranberries can still be grown with the water that is now being painfully nursed back into their ravished domain.

It started with the timber barons in 1848 or thereabout. Even before the government negotiated a treaty with the two tribes, the lumbermen were camped on the bank of the Yellow River with twenty teams of young oxen ready to go. By 1890 they had pretty well cleaned up; there are still a few paper mills in a near-by county, but they get most of their pulp wood from northern Minnesota and Canada, paying as much as $5.00 a cord for freight. The Land Development Division of the state agricultural department urges them to grow their timber in their own back yards and they'd like to—if. But there are so many "ifs" in this complex but far from unique physiographic, economic and sociological problem that the rough solution proposed by the Federal government seems, on the whole, the best way out. It is to turn most of this area into a bird, fish, and game sanctuary; that means using the labor provided by the transient and CCC camps to dam those foolish ditches, get the water level back, restore the sphag-

num and the complex plant and animal life that feeds the fish and the game birds, bring water to the commercial cranberry bogs, cut fire trails so that fires can be stopped before they burn what is left of the second growth and the peat, and finally, reshuffle the population into some reasonable conformity with the new physiographic base.

I saw some of these things already being done. The Federal government is developing a program and the FERA, the Forestry and Fisheries Departments, the Indian Bureau, also various state departments and the Agricultural Experiment Station—they are all in on it. Between them, by an enormous expenditure of labor and much jarring of official jealousies, they may be able to unscramble the idiocies of four generations of grabbers, speculators and destroyers.

In the process they will expose and conflict with the fiscal bankruptcies and legal impossibilities of town, county, and state government. What, for example, will the business men of the little trading center of Necedah do if the government moves their tributary population elsewhere. Necedah has already raised the question. The cranberry growers, having vested interests in certain riparian rights, have raised other questions. Finally, if the ditches are dammed, the water level raised, the complex natural and human ecology restored—if then five times as many cranberries are grown in Juneau County as at present, what will happen to the Massachusetts and New Jersey growers? If the market were flooded, might it not then be necessary to unplug the ditches, and by returning the land to desert, peg the market for cranberries? In other words, is it possible to plan and order the physiography

and the economy of any part of economy without a functional coördination of the whole?

Without trying to answer this question, but still sticking to my theme of idiocies and impossibilities, let me say a word about those ditches. They were dug about 1900, when agriculture was expanding and the tide of immigration was at its height. The owners of the land—including some of the lumber barons who had ravished it from the Indians and mined the timber—issued $783,000 worth of Drainage District Bonds and the banks bought them. With this money, most of which was never repaid, they dug the ditches which were to make fertile farms out of this sandy marsh. Because of the black peat surface the land looked good and hundreds of farmers—including some dry farmers returning disappointed from the Dakotas and Montana—bought it.

Even then some of the state agricultural experts knew better. They shouted in vain that this was sand, and that only impossibly heavy expenditures of potash would make it possible to grow anything on it. They pointed out what any layman can see now, simply by driving into and out of the bed of that glacial lake, that there were huge acreages of better land elsewhere in Wisconsin and that the immigrants should be settled on this relatively better land if anywhere.

But the ditches were dug; the land was drained and sold at peak prices. Then the water level fell; the farmers turned the shallow peat sod, found the sand underneath, gave up trying to grow profitable crops and departed. The county carried more and more tax-delinquent land; its fiscal base contracted although it was obliged to maintain

roads and schools for the residual scattered population of submarginal farmers. It got much worse after the War when the bottom fell out of the agricultural market. It got unspeakably worse with the depression and the drought, and now the New Deal faces the task of re-planning and re-ordering the whole business.

I asked Hank Thunder, the Winnebago, who had come back from Nebraska to pick cranberries where his tribe had formerly picked them, what he thought about it. Had the white men scrambled things impossibly? Would the Winnebagos, some day, have their turn again?

Hank, I was told, understands English and can answer questions if he chooses. He did not choose.

13

A CENTURY OF EVASION

I HAVE testified, in all sincerity, to the huge interest and value of the Century of Progress show as a source of data, even a source of inspiration for the student. But it must also be said, in plain prose, that the Biggest Show Ever was not, in any true sense, an exposition, and that its title was a misnomer.

From a civilized point of view, our history, for much more than a century, has been a history of flight from reality, of evasion. The achieved result of this evasion has been to deposit upon the doorsteps of this generation a heart-breaking accumulation of crimes against nature and crimes against man; of false philosophies and shoddy, adolescent dreams which have been elaborately institutionalized, even architectured in stone and steel: in short, an accumulation of childish social, economic and political bankruptcies. That these bankruptcies seem childish, viewed in the chastened perspective with which the depression generation must read the present and the future, does not make them any less ugly, or less difficult to liquidate.

In my own case I brought some prior recognition of this fact to my journalistic task. But it seemed to me that almost any traveling reporter, even unaided by books, could feel it in his bones long before he reached the midway

point of the continent. The very landscape shouts it at you.

I passed this midway point the second month and moved into Wisconsin—into a social and political landscape which has been sanitated and vivified for over half a century by the elder La Follette and his sons, by the Milwaukee Socialists, and by a State University Brain Trust which, having boasted John R. Commons and others, is too sophisticated to boast much about Glenn Frank.

Wisconsin, as I realized almost immediately, was different. Even on the surface it exhibited more political vitality than any other state I had been through. And when I got below the surface I found that the dilemma of "progress," as I have described it, was one of the familiar commonplaces of public and private discussion and had been so, long before the depression.

Wisconsin, at least, knew what it was up against. For years it had been analyzing its dilemma, stating it and restating it in government reports, graphing it with colored maps and charts, sloganizing it in political campaigns, even slowly and painfully embodying a few inadequate palliatives in legislation. No other state has had so much "reform." For example, the Pennsylvania Security League, a political pressure group of labor and middle-class liberals, is now agitating for legislative reforms three-quarters of which are already on the statute books of Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin public documents which exhibit and more or less confess the bankruptcy of American "progress" are radical in their analyses—and mildly liberal in their recommendations. They are parochial in that they tend to ignore the fact that Wisconsin is inextricably in-

volved with the general process of national and international conflict and disintegration.

Wisconsin is close to the political breaking point, not because its economic and social dilemma is more acute than that of many other states (it is, in fact, much less acute) but because its political development is higher. Hence the politicians can come close to telling the raw truth, even in print.

For example, Governor Philip La Follette, in his letter dated April 20, 1932, acknowledging the report of the Committee on Land Use and Forestry, already felt sufficiently assured to permit himself the following paragraph:

> We must give a wider meaning and definition to the term government if we are to emerge successfully from the present crisis. We are learning that there can be no arbitrary separation between a responsible exercise of power and authority by government officials in the narrow sense and by those who are engaged in the great basic economic activities, whose decisions and actions have a decisive influence upon the life of the community.

It seems to me that a free, but essentially accurate translation of this Æsopian language would read somewhat as follows:

> True government must have power commensurate with its responsibilities. The responsibility of government is to promote and defend the maximum economic and social welfare of the total population. To this end the state must have power to control and use to the best possible advantage of the whole people the total means of production—land, min-

erals, forests, machinery, labor and talent. The power to govern must include the power to govern business and "those who are engaged in the great basic economic activities" can be permitted no decisions and actions which handicap governmental officials in the discharge of the responsibilities which the vote of the people has placed upon them.

My paraphrase becomes clearly a Socialist statement. But even the Governor's own careful language is Socialist by implication. Wisconsin had got that far by 1932. "Those who are engaged in the great basic economic activities"—Wisconsin's super-government of business, in other words—penetrated young Governor La Follette's Æsopian language sufficiently so that in 1934 he had the fight of his political life to get reëlected. Pressed by the rank and file Progressives, and somewhat against his own will, he had broken the frail umbilical cord that united him to the Republican Party. He won by a narrow margin and largely, I was told, because the Wisconsin Federation of Labor, which in 1934 put on more strikes than any other state has seen and won most of them, threw its weight with that of the rural progressives and swung the balance in young Phil's favor. The Socialists had a good colorful candidate in George Nelson, the Polk County dirt farmer, but they trailed badly, because the tradition of Wisconsin is overwhelmingly progressive and pragmatic.

But let us return to that report of the Committee on Land Use and Forestry. It is remarkably thorough and able, and despite its careful, reserved language, its implications are full of dynamite. As I read it, I reflected that a not inappropriate title for such a report would be "A Century of Evasion."

The committee was composed of two representatives of the lumber and related industries, two representatives of the Federal agencies, and two representatives of the state. The report was drafted largely by R. B. Goodman, Chairman of the Conservation Commission, Raphael Zon, Director of the Lake States Forest Experiment Station, and Professor John M. Gates, Secretary of the Executive Council. Here, in my own expanded and interpreted paraphrase, are the problems considered by the committee:

1. What to do about the progressive disemployment of the 54,000 people, 21 per cent of the workers of the state, who in 1927 were engaged in the forestry industries, including such dependent industries as paper, pulp, furniture, etc. The trends at the time the report was written indicated that between 1937 and 1946 the lumber industry, because of the exhaustion of its raw material, would be pretty much closing up shop. Since then the depression has reduced the rate of exhaustion, but should business pick up the liquidation of the forests would be promptly accelerated. Are the lumber companies, which during the past 75 years have mined the lumber wealth of Wisconsin, going to support the one-fifth of the working population set adrift? Can they afford to do so? If not, who is going to support them, by what means, and at what standard of living? How much industry and employment could be salvaged from the wreckage of Wisconsin's basic natural resource if the lumber companies could be persuaded to crop the residual forest lands instead of mining them, and to practice good forest management? Jack pine, one of the fastest growing trees, can be cut in 40 years, but on the basis of such planting a 40,000 acre holding would

pay only $8.41 per acre cut and the profit per acre would be only 21 cents. Will this look like a business to the timber barons who remember the millions they made out of mining Wisconsin's magnificent stand of virgin white pine? Will private industry invest on a forty-year gamble of this kind and build back the productivity of Wisconsin timber lands? What about the competition of other areas? What about wood substitutes and other technological discoveries? Is there any assurance that the wood planted will be the wood wanted 40, 80, 100 years from now?

2. What about the chain of public bankruptcies—town, county, and state—which is entailed by the steady accumulation of tax delinquent land in the hands of public authorities? If the towns and counties of the cutover regions can no longer support schools, roads, public health nurses, etc., as they demonstrably cannot, no more can the state or even the Federal government, if the tax base is to be destroyed by the exhaustion of physical resources, the abandonment of agriculture and industry, and the migration of population.

3. What to do with the subsistence farmers, working submarginal cutover land, no longer obtaining supplementary employment from the departed lumber mills, living on roads the county can't afford to keep up, and unable to feed and clothe themselves, let alone pay taxes? Should the state develop *more* subsistence farming? The Committee says flatly: "Theoretically, all agricultural farming should stop and all scattered settlements should be vacated at once." It also points out that there is really no such thing as subsistence farming—the farmer must either have supplementary industrial employment or pro-

duce a cash crop if he is to pay his taxes. In any case his agricultural production, even if he consumes it all himself, reduces by that much the market of the commercial cash-crop farmers. The Committee further observes: "Somehow there is a belief that good soil can be made out of submarginal land if only we can get the *right* farmers on the land. Too often the right farmer is a man with a low standard of living."

4. Suppose the state followed the theoretically correct policy, that of stopping all agricultural settlement and vacating all scattered settlements: how could such a policy be effectuated? How can private land companies, townships, and counties be prevented from selling marginal land to suckers?

The general question toward which all these detailed problems lead is the following:

What population can be supported, and at what standard of living, in a state whose major natural resource of lumber has been expended and wasted, and the productivity of whose agricultural land has, partly because of the denudation of forest cover, been impaired by erosion?

The financial solvency of the state can be restored only by restoring the solvency of individual agricultural and industrial producers. But the standard of living of Wisconsin's citizens, and the standards of its publicly supported educational, health, road maintenance and other services were established during the period when Wisconsin was living on, and using up, its rich capital of natural resources. Moreover, the exploitation of this resource, the mining, rather than cropping of Wisconsin forests, was a major factor in building up the treeless prairie states—

Kansas, Iowa—whose farm houses and barns were built with Wisconsin white pine. The Wisconsin farmers must now compete with the Iowans and Kansans whom in the past they have more or less subsidized with cheap lumber.

Wisconsin can no longer afford to be generous either to its own citizens or in its attitudes toward its neighbors. Instead of being first among the lumber producing states, as it was between 1899 and 1904, Wisconsin now ranks fourteenth. Instead of the thousand saw mills of 1890, it now has about 200. The white pine is gone, even the pulp wood is almost gone. In 1932 the paper pulp industry had only enough supplies in the state for one year's consumption and only enough in the adjoining states and Canada for five years' production. By 1937 this major Wisconsin industry will have used up its supplies.

Meanwhile, tax delinquency spreads like a blight, starting in the northern counties and creeping southward. As early as 1927, the 17 northern counties owned 1,900,000 acres of land which had been secured by tax delinquency —the total acreage of the state being 35 million. By 1930, Oneida County alone held tax certificates against 35.9 per cent of its total area and other counties were showing a similar trend. This terrifying avalanche of cutover, burned over, eroded, and other submarginal land into the laps of county, state and Federal authorities has accelerated with each year of the depression. Nobody knows with any degree of accuracy what the tax delinquent totals are today in Wisconsin or elsewhere.

When land becomes tax delinquent the bottom drops out of everything. The narrowed tax base of the better land, the residual solvent industries, must carry a heavier

proportionate burden and these owners in turn become insolvent. Farms are abandoned, the farmers go on relief, and the remaining occupied farms are impossibly scattered. The per capita expense of schools in some of the northern, sparsely settled communities rises to as much as $386 per pupil as against $41 in the more fortunate towns. Schools are abandoned, roads are neglected. The country goes back to the wilderness, but a meager, barren wilderness, not the game-filled forest paradise of long ago.

The whole economy operates in reverse: the paupered township leans on the county, which leans on the state, which leans on the Federal government, which leans financially on the blue sky of a concealed or overt inflation.

Through page after page of this report there sounds the muted, impotent cry: "Too late, too late." For Wisconsin, the happy days ended in 1900, not 1929. By the former year, approximately, Wisconsin's agriculture had reached the peak of its development. The best land for farming had long since been brought into production. Already the lumber wealth of the state had been pretty much gutted. But if even at that time reforestation had been begun, if settlers had been kept off the poor land, the situation with respect to the lumber industry and the financing of the rural population would, in the 1930's, have been in tolerable shape. Even in 1900 there were farsighted men in the government forestry and agricultural services who pointed this out, who cried, in that cutover wilderness, for conservation and control. They cried in vain, for like the present governor of Wisconsin, they had social responsibility without economic or political power.

The lumber barons and the land colonization companies had the power and used it to promote first their immediate profit and second the ultimate bankruptcy of one of the most beautiful, fertile and richly endowed states of the union.

The report does not say this, except by implication. It recites the facts and in its brief recommendations makes a meager best of a bad business. It urges:

1. A permanent committee on land use to coöperate with the National Committee on Land Utilization.
2. The decentralization of forest protection and forest management through the creation of four northern and central conservation areas.
3. Increase in the area of public forests both through purchase and through organization of tax delinquent land under forest management.
4. The application of the zoning law by local governments to the end that agricultural land be segregated from forest, recreational and other wild land.
5. The equalization of assessments as between property classes, and a fair distribution of government costs.
6. The substitution of a yield tax for the annual property tax on mature and growing timber.

The report concludes with the following significant sentence: "If, however, these measures by themselves prove insufficient in ensuring a sensible utilization of the new forest crops, then there will be ample time to develop the more specific recommendations for the safeguarding of public interests."

Sufficient? Ample time? The dilemma today, despite

Wisconsin's relatively high political development, despite her able progressive governor, despite her numerous highly trained and devoted public servants is no nearer solution than it was when this report was written. The continuation and acceleration of the trends, so expertly defined by the Committee, are likely to make it worse even though many of its recommendations, such as zoning and enlargement of state and national forests, have been carried out. And the Gordian knot of this dilemma—responsibility without power—remains uncut. The way out for Wisconsin is that indicated in the Æsopian language of the Governor's letter of acknowledgment: the union of responsibility with power which can only be achieved by a socialization of the total resources of the state. That, in turn, since Wisconsin is anything but self-sufficient, would logically imply the socialization of the total national economy. And when the revolution comes, it will inherit, not a going concern, but the chaotic residue of a century of evasion, of exploitation, of waste, of social and political fake and failure.

That is what "progress" looks like a couple of hundred miles northwest of the Century of Progress Sky Ride. Nor does it seem much different in any other state of the union. The essential elements of the description written by Wisconsin's Committee on Land Use and Forestry would apply almost equally to all the lumber states.

And if, for lumber, one substitutes coal, oil, iron and other national resources, including the primary resource of arable top-soil and sub-soil moisture, they would apply to a score of others.

The wonder is, not that at this climax of the Century of Progress we find our whole economy slipping into reverse, but that we should be so surprised and disconcerted by this easily predictable and freely predicted dénouement of the American tragi-comedy. In relation to this fundamental bankruptcy which is public as well as private, social and political as well as economic, moral as well as intellectual—which over much of the continent has left nature herself prostrate and unable to help us—we exhibit about as much dignity and sophistication as a Wall Street lamb bleating over his stock losses in the aftermath of Black Thursday.

We are a mob of nouveaux-pauvres, all of us more or less "on relief"—lumber barons as well as lumber jacks, mill owners as well as mill operatives, tobacco barons as well as the residents of Tobacco Road—all still putting on the swank of a great and prosperous nation, and all of us imagining that we still have what it takes, which we haven't. Some of what it takes we shall never have again—the ravaged virgin timber, the fantastically wasted mineral resources, the rain- and wind-eroded top soil. But we have enough of nature left if we can only develop in time the social and political disciplines and graces of a civilized people; that means that we must abandon quickly and coincidently the obsolete barbarism of industrial capitalism and the naïve vulgarity of the pioneer, acquisitive social psychology.

That is a large order and nowhere did I see any political grouping that seems likely to deliver it in time. Even in the politically advanced states of Wisconsin and Minnesota it seemed to me that the social lags were insuperable; that

the masses of farmers, workers and middle-class people were still milling around and in their desperation likely to attack almost anything except the root of the dilemma —the separation of power from responsibility.

Governor La Follette was tugging at that root when he acknowledged the really hair-raising report whose contents I have summarized. But he was tugging in the traditional terms of the democratic dogma expressed in the phrase, "We, the people." We have never had in this country any such identity of interest as is implied in that first person plural. We have instead an established system, sanctioned in law and approved by custom in the operation of which one class of the population has been encouraged not merely to exploit the other classes, but to destroy the very physiographic base of the continent from which the total population must ultimately draw its sustenance.

For many months President Roosevelt's liberal critics have been taking a refined intellectual pleasure in baiting him because of his inability to make up his mind about anything. Of course he can't make up his mind—not as long as he is bound to the myth of the democratic dogma; not as long as he is bound by the terms of his popular mandate to essay the impossible task of expressing the will of a "we" which is no we—which is merely the festering stalemate of pressure groups whose interests are not identical but conflicting.

It struck me that the democratic dogma would probably crack at the periphery before it cracks at the center; that in Wisconsin and Minnesota the necessary class fission was more or less imminent, although it probably won't happen soon enough. For before the Northwest gets around to

consolidating and expressing a "we" that means something—a "we" of farmers, workers and technicians which deliberately excludes and invalidates the interest of business and finance—before that happens, the center, urged by the example of Europe, will probably have cast the dice for martial suicide in the next war.*

* I submitted this chapter for correction and criticism to one of the Wisconsin experts who is thoroughly acquainted with the material. With his permission, I print the following excerpt from his letter:

". . . you have got the 'guts' of the whole report, brought out its economic implications, and analyzed the situation very realistically. About a year or so ago I would have fully subscribed to your conclusions. Today, I do not know. . . .

"It is all right to talk of 'the responsibility of the government in promoting and defending the maximum economic and social welfare of the total population.' Is not this exactly what Hitler and Mussolini, as well as the socialists in general, advocate? It all apparently depends on who gets there first and assumes that responsibility. In Russia, by an historic accident, this responsibility fell into the right hands. In Italy, and especially in Germany, the wrong crowd succeeded in grasping that responsibility.

"With the exception of Wisconsin and possibly one or two other states, I personally would not trust the state governments to assume such absolute, unchallenged responsibility. Theoretically, and from the standpoint of efficiency, such a principle is correct. At the present state of mind of our population, I am afraid the granting of such power could mean nothing but a step toward fascism. Until the people in this country are ripe to entrust such a responsibility to a truly representative government, I prefer to 'muddle through' with our democracy. At least, under such a democracy, we would not lose the few liberties we still have, and exchange them for a 'mess of pottage,' even if we should get that."

The book context in which this chapter falls will indicate that I agree pretty fully with the writer of this comment. In posing the contradiction of responsibility without power, I did not mean to suggest that the contradiction could be resolved within the framework of the capitalist society. Fascism, in my view, combines the maximum of power with the maximum of irresponsibility, and the domestic and international chaos which it ultimately precipitates is far more difficult to liquidate than the confusions of the quasi-democratic states.

14

HOW RADICAL ARE THE FARMERS?

I DROVE some two thousand miles through the agricultural regions of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and South Dakota. I talked to scores of farmers, as well as to educators, agricultural economists, journalists, farmer-business men connected with the producers' and consumers' coöperatives, and miscellaneous citizens. In addition I attended two conventions of the Farmers Educational and Coöperative Union—the Wisconsin state convention at Wasau, and the national convention at Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

For over half a century the radical agrarians of the Northwest have been rolling up thunder clouds of protest and agitation, and now and then discharging them in a sparse rainfall of political and economic action, quickly absorbed and frustrated by the advancing conquests of industrial capitalism. Meanwhile, for reasons already indicated, both the physiographic and economic bases of the Northwest have been getting drier and drier.

In spite of these cumulative pressures, this radical agrarianism, it seems to me, is still hobbled by the obsolete economics of populism and by the obstinate parochialism of the pioneer-competitive social psychology. They realize, many of these agrarian leaders, that, as Louis Hacker has pointed out, "the farmer is doomed" by all the forces of finance capital, technological rationalization, and New

Deal cartelization; what they do not realize is that the doom of the farmer is no unique and invidious destiny, but merely one of the major consequences of the inability of the capitalist economy either to finance domestic consumption or to fructify foreign trade. The politics, even of the more advanced wing of the organized farmers, is still nationalist, isolationist; their psychology is still that of ragged, angry, dispossessed and jealous small capitalists. The danger of this condition, in view of the steady trend toward state capitalism and fascism, is apparent enough. I even encountered here and there the characteristic demagogic formulations of fascism, including anti-Semitism.

To set against this, however, we have the full-throated *verbal* rejection of the AAA scarcity promotion program by the Farmers Union and the Farm Holiday Association; also the increasing currency of such phrases as "the cooperative commonwealth" and "production for use"—unimplemented, however, by any clear-headed tactical formulas. At the Wisconsin convention I even heard some rather astonishing versions of the class struggle in agrarian terms. Here is a sample:

"You are a class, Brothers and Sisters, a class of slaves, a voiceless herd of cattle. For years you have understood that you were the slaves of society. Why else have you educated John or Mary to be a doctor, a teacher, a business man—anything but a farmer or a farmer's wife? You have sent the best minds, the best spirits to the city, and have left the worst on the farm to become the future peons of America. What makes you think you have anything in common with these bankers, business men, Rotarians? They are a class; they know it, and organize as a class.

Well, it's time you did the same thing. You've got to take out a card in a militant farm union."

It sounds like the anarchist Galleani in his best rabble-rousing manner. But the speaker is Charles Talbot, president of the North Dakota Farmers Union. He owns a big ranch near Jamestown, North Dakota. He is no peon. In Russia they would class him a kulak, or even a landed proprietor. And at the national convention at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, two weeks after that speech, he was standing with the right wing of the convention, which wanted to placate the secedent Nebraska union by yielding to its demand that Edward E. Kennedy, the national secretary, be replaced. The right wing lost when the candidacy of Cal Ward, Kansas president, for the national vice presidency, was ruled out on the ground that a Farmers Union state official who got more of his income from the government than he did from the union was not eligible to hold a national office. (Ward had been paid $15 a day by the AAA for his services in putting over the corn-hog acreage reduction program.) In the convention fight the expletives "pay-roller" and "bird-dog" were freely used in the lobbies and even on the floor. But Fritz Shulheis, retiring National Board member, who was active in the fight against the right-wingers, himself holds the position of Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture in Wisconsin, having been put there more or less at the demand of the Wisconsin Farmers Union. And both right wing and left wing spokesmen were equally eloquent in denouncing the scarcity-promotion program of Secretary Wallace and in demanding "cost of production," government financing of farm loans, and agricultural embargoes. I was obliged to conclude, there-

fore, that farmers' conventions, like labor conventions, are highly political, that the strife of leaders is intense, and that as between right, center and left only a highly sophisticated reporter could be sure which was which; also that they were all well to the right of anything that could be described as revolutionary radicalism.

From the New Deal point of view, Milo Reno represents the left of the farmers' movement. It was he who put Cal Ward on the spot in the national convention and no one denounced more loudly the program of the triple A. Well, I pursued Brother Reno to his hotel, scratched his radicalism and underneath found both fundamentalism and anti-Semitism.

Reno is an ex-farmer-preacher in his middle sixties, with the canny eyes of a politician; his "grass-roots," I suspect, have long since been withered by the hot wind of his conscious or unconscious demagoguery. Cost of production, remonetization of silver, embargoes on agricultural products—he was emphatically for the Farmers Union line, as well as some eccentric side lines such as his opposition to the government's destruction of tubercular cattle. But, I asked, did he not think that socialization of the land would ultimately be necessary? No. That would be Communism, and he was against Communism.

"I'm a believer in the Bible," said Brother Reno. "We don't want Communism in this country. It breeds paganism. It did in Germany, didn't it?"

I tried earnestly to differentiate Nazism from Communism, but with no success—they were all the same thing to Milo Reno. I also pointed out that Nazism had bred not only a rococo paganism, but also, and more impor-

tantly, anti-Semitism. What did Brother Reno think about that? Why, at the session of the convention just concluded, had he referred publicly to the New Deal as the "Jew Deal." At which Brother Reno closed up. There is plenty of Nazi propaganda, including the mythical Semitic genealogies for American statesmen, the "protocols of Zion," etc., being slipped into R.F.D. mail boxes throughout the Middle West and Northwest. Maybe Brother Reno has no connection with this agitation, but it is entirely in line with his fundamentalist prejudices.

The more I talked to Brother Reno, the more I found myself thinking of Wilbur Glenn Voliva, whom I had interviewed in Zion City. Wilbur also believes in the literal truth of the Bible. Moreover, he believes, or pretends to believe, that the earth is flat. On top of this he believes in some kind of ecclesiastical coöperative commonwealth, although the coöperatively produced peanut brittle I bought in the Zion restaurant was not good. Wilbur wears a prehistoric boiled shirt with foot-long cuffs that stick out at you like cannon when you sit opposite him. I had to go through two secretaries and three deacons before I was privileged to interview the prophet. The top of his head was dusty, like the white-maned head of Bryan in his last, fundamentalist-real-estate period.

Wilbur, I noted, reads the papers. He says he gets his prophecies of doom out of the Bible, but I think he gets them out of the papers. The little boys in Zion City speak slightingly of the prophet. They refer to his tabernacle as the "White Dove Movie Palace." I think the prophet knew that I knew that he didn't believe in his prophecies, or care much. A seedy, dusty, dated showman, but useful by

way of reminding us that fundamentalism, with its cult aberrations, still lives, and must be watched out for.

Reno is of course a much abler, more honest and more important figure. In his time he has been a fighter, a leader ahead of his crowd, and in some respects he still is. None the less, it seemed to me that his variegated ignorances and prejudices were highly dangerous. If the farmers want to go anywhere except into fascism they had better get rid of Milo Reno.

I saw no evidence that the Holiday Association shares Reno's anti-Semitism, and some evidence that it is, in general, to the left of its national president. Of all the farmers' meetings I attended, the most impressive was a conference of delegates from the drought-stricken counties of western Minnesota, organized by John Bosch, President of the Minnesota Farm Holiday Association, to petition Governor Olson for more help than the FERA and the AAA were giving them. For the better part of a day they matched facts and arguments with the state relief administrator and came out better than even. Not, however, with more stock feed, which was what they wanted. There was no money for that. They warned that the farmers had only two or three days' feed ahead for their stock; that if the snow came and covered what was left of their meager forage, the farmers would probably take by force what little roughage there was stored in the region. (They did precisely that in Appleton, Minnesota, a few days later.)

This man, you might guess, must have been a thoroughly class-conscious farmer. I visited him later at his farm near Montevideo. House, barns, and land were well kept. Here again was no peon. He told me that he had

been a dealer in land in Iowa and had lost out in the "landslide" a few years ago. He had salvaged enough to make a good payment on 200 acres of Minnesota land and had done reasonably well until the dry years came. As business man and farmer, alternately and both together, he was more or less typical of the membership not merely of the Farmers Union but of the Holiday Association. That is why it is hard to make the phrase, "class consciousness," mean anything as applied to farmers. Farmers are in business. Farmers are also traders, capitalists, land speculators—broke speculators, oppressed and dispossessed capitalists, if you like, but still pretty much dominated by the individualist business man's psychology. Moreover the generic word "farmer" includes a multitude of species: the Wisconsin freeholder, the southern share-cropper, the western fruit tramp, the shipper-growers of California's Imperial Valley and elsewhere, the Mexican and Filipino peons used by these farming corporations.

The conflicts implicit in these divergencies of status are as apparent in the Northwest as elsewhere. Why, for example, doesn't the Holiday Association, most of whose members also belong to the Farmers Union, merge with the latter organization? Because the Holiday Association is not in business, owns no property, and is consequently footloose, whereas the Farmers Union is tied to the complex structure of producers' and consumers' coöperatives, most of which center in St. Paul and Chicago. The members of the Holiday Association describe themselves cheerfully as the "scrub women" for the Farmers Union. It is they who stop evictions and stage milk strikes. And it is they, significantly, who join forces with organized labor,

as recently when the Minnesota Holiday Association fed the striking truck drivers of Minneapolis. As for the Farmers Union, as late as the convention of 1924 it came close to passing a resolution deploring the use of the strike as a weapon in labor disputes. It has traveled leftward since then, but not as far as one might suppose.

The farmers are in business. The Sioux Falls convention passed a resolution introduced by the delegate from California, K. V. Garrod, who is incidentally a member of the California State Board of Agriculture, opposing "unreasonable rules applied by the Food and Drug Association for the protection of the consumer." The trouble was about prune juice, a designation for the new product of the California Prune Growers Association which the Food and Drug Administration objected to. There were a few objections to the effect that the consumers ought to know what the coöperative prune growers put in the bottle, but the resolution passed. Even more significant was the split-up of the Minnesota union two years ago, caused by the inability of the "educational"—that is to say, political-organizational-legislative—part of the Farmers Educational and Coöperative Union to get along with the coöperative part, which consisted of the Farmers Union Central Exchange, Live Stock Commission, and Grain Corporation.

A word about these coöperatives. Radical phrases such as the "coöperative commonwealth" are imbedded in their constitution and declarations of principles. But with the possible exception of the Finnish coöperatives in northwestern Minnesota they seem to be anything but class-conscious, and many of the coöperative leaders make a

point of being non-political as a matter of principle. The Finns have a small string of coöperative stores centering in Cloquet, Minnesota, and in this region have more or less completed the circuit of producer and consumer co-operatives. For them, coöperation has a social and cultural content derived from their old country tradition; only with great difficulty is any such content injected into the American coöperatives. The Finns don't understand this. A while back, at a coöperative meeting, a disgusted Finn exclaimed: "You Americans think a coöperative is something to make money out of." That is pretty much what they do think. And in a Farmer-Labor state, Minnesota, non-political philosophy of the coöperatives raises some curious contradictions. For example, the head of the Land O' Lakes Butter Coöperative is a leading Republican Stalwart, who was almost induced to run for Governor against Olson.

The coöperatives, especially the consumer coöperatives founded on the coöperative distribution of gasoline and oil, have been flourishing during the depression, and one does not wish in the least to discount their significance. As money-saving enterprises, and as economic arms of the Farmers Union, they have contributed aid—especially the check-off of Farmers Union dues—as well as embarrassment. But it is not unfair to say that the growth of these organizations, in their present form, and limited by their present philosophy, cannot be taken, in and of itself, as an index of the spread of radicalism among the farmers.

The Farmers Union Youth Movement—otherwise known as the "Juniors"—will be a better index when and if it really gets going. The Juniors were very much in the

foreground both at Wasau and at Sioux Falls. They sang and recited and danced, and produced the inevitable pageant with a stage populated by the personified abstractions of Truth, Justice, and so on. A chorus of farm boys in overalls and red bandannas sang:

> Don't go to the left,
> Don't go to the right,
> But right in the middle of the road.

Artistically, some of the numbers exhibited an unfortunate miscegenation of Broadway and the prairies. But others were pretty good, and on the whole the Juniors were impressive. The report of the Junior chairman stated:

> If we are forced to abandon capitalism we must adopt another system of economics; there is but one path open to a free people, and that is the collectivism of coöperation. It is imperative that our children understand how to use the principles of coöperation as the only known defense against a dictatorship of capital with its impending rule of terror, sabotage and war.

What kind of radicalism is this, and is it likely to develop an organization and a tactic adequate to deal with the economic and social dilemma of the farmers? Only the future can answer.

Meanwhile it may be said that on the showing of the Sioux Falls convention the farmers are making progress. No new splits developed, and the national secretary reported the organization of new state unions in Alabama, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, with a combined new membership of 40,000; also fifteen other states in process of

organization. All factions represented at the convention united in opposing the crop-reduction program of the AAA and in demanding that when the government takes plebiscites of the farmers it give them a chance to vote for a cost of production as against a crop-reduction program.

But the most impressive thing about these farmers' meetings was the farmers who attended them. They are not peons yet; they are not as dumb as they like to call themselves; and most of them—the younger ones especially—have stopped being fundamentalists. There are better, more realistic, ideas being brewed under the surface than appear in the Farmers Union line. What with one thing and another, I reflected, it looks like more trouble ahead for Secretary Wallace.*

* A radical agricultural economist supplies the following footnote to this chapter:

What you are talking about here, of course, is capitalist farmers, who are the articulate agricultural groups and who operate largely in the northwest. It must be kept clearly in mind that there are two other major capitalist classes in the United States:

1. The agricultural laborers.
2. The smaller farmers—farmers who have small debts (because they do not produce primarily for markets) and small cash incomes. At least half the farmers in the United States belong in this category. These farmers cannot be interested in the financial programs of the capitalist farmers: cost of production, moratoria, etc.

These two groups can be radicalized or neutralized; the capitalist farmer I am suspicious of. And "cost of production" can be turned so easily into a fascist slogan. The workers would hold the bag with higher prices.

15

THE TERRIBLE SWEDE

A POLITICIAN is a specialist. He clings to the second hand of the political clock, and the political reporter, also a specialist, must gyrate along with him and pretend that he is going somewhere. A radical labor leader, by benefit of Marx, Lenin, and others, is a good deal more impressive. He at least rides the minute hand of the class struggle and watches the hour hand of the total economic and social situation.

The clock was striking in Minnesota when I was there, right after the election, but nobody could tell me what time it was. Least of all, Floyd Bjornsterne Olson.

Mr. Olson wished he knew. For sound, practical, political reasons, he would have given a good deal to know. He is one of the cleverest and, I suspect, one of the shallowest men in public life today. He knows something about those three hands of the clock and he wanted terribly, did that Terrible Swede, to know what time it was.

He asked me and I asked him. He put his long legs on his desk in the Governor's office, glanced at the late afternoon sun, and tried out his political sextant on us—me, and the Associated Press and United Press reporters who shared the interview. Says the Governor:

"I am for the Roosevelt administration when as and if it puts through a program of social legislation that may be

a stepping-stone to the Coöperative Commonwealth. But if the farmers of the Middle West and Northwest don't get parity—I prefer to call it equality of treatment with the industrialists—I expect to participate in an agrarian political revolt which in 1936 will bring a third party into the national arena and shatter all existing political alignments."

Nobody is hurt yet, no crockery is broken and no bridges are burned. We still don't know what time it is. The Terrible Swede has got to do better than that, I reflect, or my editor will be disappointed. So I prod him with the first stick that comes to hand.

What about the extension of the FERA production projects, I asked. What would Minnesota, the center of the coöperative movement of the Northwest, do with these projects, and what would they lead to? Could these enterprises be made the nucleus of a production-for-use economy that would eventually displace the profit economy?

I saw immediately that I had led right into the Governor's hand. He had just been reëlected for his third term on a platform so loaded with Socialistic verbalisms that a careful "interpretation" of its more alarming pronouncements was gotten out to soothe the apprehensions of Olson's more conservative constituents. That platform, adopted during the Governor's absence and written largely by that ebullient ex-preacher Howard Y. Williams, had given Olson a good many headaches during the campaign—it had cut his previous majority in half. But he had won out, nevertheless, and now a modicum of leftism would be good political capital, especially in Washington.

Would Minnesota push ahead, gradually, left of the New Deal, on the road to state socialism?

"That's what I'd like to do," declared the Governor. "That's my hellish purpose. Of course, I don't know what the FERA has in mind. [Neither did anybody else, including the FERA, I reflected.] I'll know more about that when I get back from Washington."

The Governor pointed out that in Minnesota the co-operative enterprises have shown a smaller percentage of failure than businesses operated for profit. It would be logical, therefore, for the government to put money and effort into building up these enterprises.

But I didn't intend to let him off as easily as that. Somewhat unkindly, I pointed out that the idle factories taken over by the FERA for purposes of mattress-making, furniture-making, canning, etc., were, in Minnesota as elsewhere, marginal factories; that the workers in these factories were selected not on the basis of training or efficiency but on the basis of need; that my observations in Ohio and elsewhere had convinced me that the FERA had in mind, if anything, not the erection of a production-for-use economy, manned by the depression bloc of extra-economic relief clients, which would ultimately displace the profit economy, but merely the reduction of the relief load. That was to be accomplished, theoretically, by making the relief workers—insulated by a cordon sanitaire from the surrounding profit economy and exchanging their gertrudes, comforters, mattresses, canned foods, etc., by a primitive system of barter—feed, clothe, and furnish themselves. But even if the local Chambers of Commerce didn't kill off those production-for-use, government-subsi-

dized rabbits in their infancy, as they were at that moment trying with great earnestness to do—the relief load wouldn't be reduced. Because the resultant narrowing of the market for the products of commercially employed workers would progressively ripen a new crop of relief clients, at the same time depleting the taxable solvency of the commercial employers.

Olson admitted most of this. But Minnesota, he thought, might be different.

"Depending upon how the FERA operates these factories," he said, "it may be possible to compete in efficiency with commercial management, especially since the workers will have the social incentive of producing for themselves rather than for the profit of the owner. Also, under the police power, it is possible to do indirectly many things which are incidental to the preservation of health and welfare which it is not possible to do directly. I think it would be possible legally to take over factories and sell the goods produced on the open market. It would start as a relief measure and end as a reëmployment measure, since the public welfare requires reëmployment."

As for the coöperatives, the Governor believed that if fixed prices were established for basic agricultural commodities—the Farmers Union line—then the coöperative movement would expand irresistibly.

"The packers would not be able to stop them, then," he declared. "The trouble with the AAA, and with that amiable philosopher Henry Wallace, is that every plan has to conform to the capitalistic pattern. The Farmer-Labor Party does not suffer this limitation. We are neither allied

with nor indebted to capitalism. Our base is the workers, the farmers, the coöperatives."

All of which I had no difficulty in recognizing as a kind of political, quasi-Social Democratic hot-cha—enough to get Olson headlines in the morning papers, but nothing more. I did not express my skepticism to the Governor, especially as I was pretty sure he knew better. In his youth he was a Wobbly, and he has swallowed a considerable smattering of Marxian economics in his time. But he doesn't intend to be pushed off the clock face, and his perch is on that gyrating second hand. As to what time it was in Minnesota, he was sure only of this: that it was no time for an aspiring politician—he will run for the Senate in 1936—to do much more than make fierce Populist faces. That was safe enough, especially as the Farmer-Labor Party had failed to elect a majority in either the Assembly or the Senate, and Olson would therefore have an excellent alibi for any post-election neglect of his platform promises.

In the interest of accuracy, and without any particular animus, I am obliged to describe Olson as a political realist and careerist. The rôle is more or less inevitable for any politician who attempts to ride the second hand of the clock, and its requirements are indeed very arduous.

In many respects, the Terrible Swede—he is half Swede and half Norwegian, an admirable combination for Minnesotans—is well equipped to play this rôle. He is a brilliant campaigner, his best asset being his complete lack of the conventional statesman's front—that and his exceptional physical equipment. He is six feet two, broad-shoul-

dered, slim-hipped, built like a prize fighter. A few hours before my interview I had seen him stride into a meeting of delegates from the primary drought area of southwestern Minnesota, who had been organized and brought to St. Paul by John Bosch, president of the Farmers Holiday Association.

They had just finished proving to the Minnesota relief director that the FERA stock feed allowance of $25 a month for the "subsistence herd" of ten units was absurdly inadequate; that if it were not increased, thousands of cattle were likely to die in the Northwest this winter; that, as one thoroughly informed and thoroughly exasperated farmer put it, "Washington must treat this thing as a calamity, not as a plaything."

The relief director had no answer to this other than that the allotment of funds from Washington did not permit a larger allowance. Neither had Olson. Admitting the dilemma, he pointed out, first that Minnesota had been treated with relative generosity by the FERA; second that there was no use discussing procedure until there was money to proceed with. As for their demand that the allotment and the "subsistence herd" be increased—the average farm in southern Minnesota is no subsistence homestead, but a normally productive unit of 160 acres—he was with them on that. He would take their resolutions to Washington and argue for them.

There was small comfort in this for the farmers and they knew it. Yet they obviously felt that Olson was their friend. And when one of the women delegates said something about it being the Governor's forty-third birthday, they all rose and cheered.

From everything that I saw and heard of Olson I was inclined to believe that he is temperamentally a radical—his sympathies are with workers and farmers rather than with big business. But he is primarily a career man in practical politics. Which means that he is bound to behave like any other radical holding office in a capitalist state. In dealing with him the workers and farmers can count, like the Pullman porter in the song, on getting sympathy, but that is about all. Being a career man, he is not willing to drop off the clock face or even to take serious chances.

His political credo printed in the April, 1935, issue of *Common Sense* says this, insofar as it says anything. And a few months after that credo was written he said it again, by implication, when he was too busy to attend the third party convention that launched the American Commonwealth Political Federation. Mr. Farley can't elect a Democratic Senator from Minnesota, so he is willing to help elect Olson, if the Governor refrains from rocking the boat. One may safely predict that Mr. Olson will refrain.

16

PUSHING THE MINUTE HAND

THE second hand of politics, in Minnesota, as elsewhere, is geared to the minute hand of the class struggle and to the hour hand of the total economic and social situation. Olson is a highly intelligent politician and knows this. What he did during the Minneapolis truck drivers' strike was pretty much what he had to do, in order to safeguard his political career. The radicals who constituted the militant leadership of Local 574, International Teamsters Brotherhood, A. F. of L., were not merely riding the minute hand, but pushing it, and the Farmer-Labor Governor, dependent for reëlection on the labor vote of the Twin Cities, was in a tight spot.

Much water has flowed under the bridges of the Twin Cities since the strike was settled. But a brief summary of what happened and why it happened should be useful to those who know only what they read in the newspapers. Similar things have happened since in Minnesota and elsewhere and will continue to happen, for similar reasons.

In February, 1934, Local 574 pulled out the coal truck drivers and after a three-day strike won a complete victory. Following this victory all kinds of drivers employed by gasoline stations, warehouses, paper houses, transfer companies, and department stores streamed into Local 574, and on May 15 the union struck for recognition and wage

increases. By this time it was apparent that the Minneapolis employers were faced by formidable opponents. Here is how the *Minneapolis Tribune* described the strike headquarters in the May strike:

> The strike headquarters that the General Drivers Union has established at 1900 Chicago are everything but a fort, and might easily be converted into that if the occasion should arise. A huge garage that chanced to be vacant has been rented until further notice. . . . The garage offices have been converted into the strike office, with desks, typewriters and stenographers. The space alongside the office is to be equipped as a commissary, in which the union members on picket duty will be fed. Much of the garage space will be needed for a fleet of cars that the union is mobilizing to carry officials and members about the city on strike business. And the fleet already is a big one and growing bigger. At the rear of the building, room has been set aside for mass meetings. A stage has been erected and scores of benches installed.

To this description should be added the later addition of a hospital and broadcasting system; a mechanical repair department; supplementary field headquarters set up at points of vantage; stationary picket posts; cruising picket lines; a daily newspaper, *The Organizer,* with its daily editions of 13,000 which continuously checkmated the propaganda of the employer-controlled press of the Twin Cities.

On May 22, a picket line of 5,000 captured the Market district; on the following day the union announced a settlement with de facto recognition, unconditional reinstatement of all strikers and an agreement to arbitrate the demands for wages and hours.

The negotiations broke down on the question of the "inside workers"—platform men, chicken pickers, banana handlers—whom Local 574 had taken into its membership. The employers immediately saw the implied threat: if 574 took in chicken pickers and fruit handlers, what was there to prevent their encompassing the entire body of unorganized workers in the city, building a union, a one-big-union, that would hold the destinies of Minneapolis in its powerful hands?

The Twin City newspapers launched a red scare, quoting from the *New Militant* to prove that "Trotzkyists" dominated the strike leadership. The employers refused to recognize the right of 574 to negotiate for the inside workers, and the union replied by calling a new strike for July 16, in spite of the repudiation by Dan Tobin, president of the International Teamsters Union, of the militant leaders of Local 574.

From the first day of the strike, the 15,000 trucks that normally rolled through the streets of Minneapolis were tied up "tighter than a bull's eye in fly time." But the employers too were well organized around a long established strike-breaking agency called the Citizens Alliance. They staged a violent comeback. Here is Governor Olson's account of what happened:

> On July 20, the police of Minneapolis, convoying a truck containing a small amount of merchandise, opened fire with riot guns upon the crowd of persons who had gathered at the scene in order to picket the movement of the truck or as bystanders. Before the shooting had ended some 50 persons had been shot, 40 of whom were shot in the back while fleeing

from the scene of disorder. Two of the persons so shot afterward died as a result of the wounds inflicted. Shortly after the shooting I proclaimed martial law in the city of Minneapolis for the purpose of protecting the citizens thereof, and for the purpose of restoring law and order.

There is no question that "Bloody Friday" was a deliberate massacre of unarmed workers. There is also no question that the entrance of the National Guard did just what the strike leaders feared it would do—it broke the backbone of the strike. From that moment on the union was fighting desperately with its back against the wall.

Politically the Governor was in an almost equally difficult position. According to his own professions, he tried to use the National Guard not merely to preserve "law and order" but to force a recalcitrant minority of the employers, led by the bank-controlled Citizens Alliance, to accept the award of the Federal mediators—the Haas-Dunnigan agreement which the union had already accepted. But the National Guard officers had their own ideas about that—many of their officers were either members of the Citizens Alliance or in close sympathy with the banks and the employers. The permit system which the Governor set up was continuously violated. Before the militia came in, practically no trucks moved; after they came in, hundreds moved.

That was the answer, from the point of view of the strike leaders, who had protested from the beginning against the calling in of the National Guard and continuously demanded its withdrawal. Faced with the slow strangulation of the strike, the union on August 1 an-

nounced the renewal of forceful picketing. And at four o'clock the next morning the Governor shook the faith of his most loyal labor supporters by raiding the strike headquarters and arresting the strike leaders. This was followed by a raid on the headquarters of the Central Labor Union.

A roar of protest went up. Some of the Governor's own political supporters threatened desertion. The union wielded the threat of a general strike and the next day the strike leaders were released, headquarters were returned to the strikers, and Colonel McDevitt of the National Guard made an apology to the officers of the Central Labor Union.

The minute hand and the second hand had jammed and the acrobatic exercises of the Governor increased in fervor. He ordered his personal aide-de-camp to raid the headquarters of the Citizens Alliance. Most of the records had been removed three days before, but enough was left to prove that this organization was acting in defiance of both state and Federal authorities; also that it controlled the Chief of Police of Minneapolis and was therefore indirectly responsible for "Bloody Friday."

However, all this didn't alter the fact that the National Guard, no matter what the Governor felt about it, was in town to break the strike, and it came close to doing just that. It set up a military stockade and threw into it 167 strike leaders and pickets. It arrested strikers who attempted to sell the union's daily strike paper. It even jailed the union's doctor.

A third Federal mediator, P. A. Donoghue, turned up, and offered a settlement substantially identical with the

old Haas-Dunnigan agreement, except that the wage provision gave the strikers two and one-half cents an hour less—50 cents for drivers and 40 cents for inside workers. The employers and the union signed up and the strike was over. I was told that the Governor had brought to bear some remote political pressure to effect this settlement; Washington, at the Governor's urgency, had suggested to the Twin Cities that the strike was too expensive politically, as well as otherwise.

One of the most significant episodes of the strikes was the ill-fated adventure of the "Law and Order Committee" of 1,500 salesmen, clerks, and patriotic golfers whom the Citizens Alliance mobilized to break the May strike. They armed themselves with baseball bats and went into battle with the trained picket squads of Local 574. The issue of this battle was never in doubt. The truck drivers drove them into alleys and houses, took their bats away from them, and slugged them with simple proletarian heartiness. Within a few minutes these minute men of business were stripping off their badges, hiding behind cops, and pretending with panic-stricken earnestness to be innocent bystanders. Months afterward I talked to a bald and elderly shopkeeper who had witnessed this skirmish. He shook with laughter in describing it, even though the casualties included the deaths of two of the minute men. He remarked cheerfully that the best men had won. Evidently his reaction was more or less typical of majority opinion in the Twin Cities. Otherwise Olson would hardly have been able to treat the episode as brusquely as he did in the following passage of his campaign speeches:

In an effort to carry out their program [according to Olson, the crushing of the entire organized labor movement in Minneapolis] the Citizens Alliance, operating through a so-called Law and Order Committee, induced some 1,500 citizens of Minneapolis to become special officers. Most of the men so enlisted were led to believe that they had a patriotic duty to enlist, equal to the patriotic duty of enlisting in a war. They were unaware that they were being used as scapegoats for the Citizens Alliance in order to keep the drivers from attaining a decent wage. They were unorganized; they were not drilled; they lacked any leadership; they were pushed into armed conflict with men made muscular by hard work rather than by sitting in offices; and unfortunately, two of them were killed and a number injured.

For many weeks, during the summer of 1934, Minneapolis had trembled on the verge of civil war, and a "radical" labor governor had found himself on the spot occupied by any politician, regardless of the color of his label, who takes office in a capitalist state. The strikers, in the end, had to fight both their bosses and the forces of "law and order," including the Farmer-Labor Governor. And Olson had to twist and squirm out of the tight spot as best he could. In justice to the Terrible Swede, it must be said that plenty of other "radical" elected officials have done much worse. He doubled his labor vote in the Twin Cities that fall, which partly made up for the votes he lost in the up-state counties. So that, as a politician, it may be said that he won a rather ragged victory.

From the point of view of the strikers, however, Olson's intervention cost them dearly. They had to fight harder, and they won less: a minimum settlement which the em-

ployers promptly undertook to chisel; a militant prestige which brought its immediate consequences in the form of persecution by the swivel chair bureaucrats of the International Teamsters. Within less than a year, Dan Tobin, the International President, had revoked Local 574's charter. . . .

When I was in Minneapolis, the leaders of 574 were still busy pushing the minute hand—so busy that they had little time for even a sympathetic reporter. When I saw Vincent Dunne, he was busy responding to the call of the Fargo, N. D., milk drivers who had struck and wanted help from Local 574; his brother, Micky Dunne, with a squad of trained picket leaders, had already left for the scene.

Vincent Dunne is a slightly built, leanly muscular workman in his early forties, with the brow and eyes of an Irish intellectual. Both the second hand of politics and the hour hand of the economic and social situation had felt the push of Vince Dunne's finely disciplined energy. The Citizens Alliance hated him deliriously; the Governor and his entourage of miscellaneous liberals and ex-Socialists were both exasperated by and respectful of Dunne's cool intransigence.

I asked Dunne what he thought the time of day was in Minnesota and his answer rather startled me. He thought that we were within two or three years of a decisive employer-worker show-down. But later, when I had a look at the hour hand of Minnesota's total economic and social situation, I was inclined to think he might be right.

It seemed clear that the maturing of the economic dilemma through successive phases of partial recovery and

deeper crisis would make more and more untenable the hopelessly confused position of Olson's or any other Farmer-Labor administration. The strike had mercilessly exposed the nature of the capitalist state power and its inevitable rôle in any crisis. Just as Ramsay MacDonald's Labor government, burdened with the job of juggling the multiplying contradictions of the English imperialist economy, was obliged to move steadily right, so Minnesota's fusion of populist-minded farmers and A. F. of L.-minded labor would find itself holding the bag for capitalism. Strike struggles would move up to the point of insurrection and recede; the naïve radicalism of the more militant farmers would expend itself in futile violence. This process might be interrupted by war or by fascism or by both. In the end it would take the path of social revolution, but how or when it seemed impossible to predict.

17

THE HOUR HAND AND "PLANNING"

LIKE Wisconsin, Minnesota knows, or should know, what it is up against. It, too, has mapped and charted its social and economic dilemma with sufficient completeness to rule out any easy reformist solutions. Much of this ground-work has been done by some of the same people who performed a similar service for Wisconsin in the report of the Committee on Land Use and Forestry which I reviewed in a previous chapter.

In August, 1932, Governor Olson appointed a committee on land utilization which rendered its report in February, 1934, the editorial committee consisting of William Anderson, Oscar B. Jesness and Raphael Zon. The findings and recommendations of the Minnesota committee are very similar to those of the Wisconsin group. Hence Governor Olson's letter of acknowledgment affords an interesting opportunity to compare his point of view with that of Governor Phil La Follette.

Governor Olson's letter was written two years after Governor La Follette had written his. The dilemma of Minnesota is more acute, if anything, than that of Wisconsin. Here was Olson's opportunity to state dramatically the veiled implications of the report and affirm the inevitable conclusion, which is that intelligent land utilization is not possible within the framework of private initiative and

ownership. But one finds nothing in Olson's cautious phrases that approaches even the Æsopian radicalism of Governor La Follette, as expressed in the sentence already quoted:

"We are learning that there can be no arbitrary separation between a responsible exercise of power and authority by government officials in the narrow sense and by those who are engaged in the great basic economic activities, whose decisions and actions have a decisive influence upon the life of the community."

A tentative conclusion from this evidence would be first, that Minnesota is politically less advanced than Wisconsin, and second that Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Governor is either less acute or more cautious than the Progressive Governor of Wisconsin. True, Governor Olson goes so far as to say:

"Through larger public ownership and the development of forests, water power, and similar primary resources, in which the public interests cannot be entrusted to private guardianship, and through social control over the other necessities of life, the government must exert a more direct influence in guiding the economic development of the region."

But nowhere does Olson pose, as did Governor La Follette two years earlier, the hopeless contradiction of responsibility without power which every liberal or quasi-radical public official must face.

Here, in a brief and hence rather crude summary, is what the Committee on Land Utilization finds the state of Minnesota is up against:

1. The imminent extinction of the forestry industries

of the state brought about by the wasteful mining of Minnesota's rich resources of virgin timber. "Four-fifths of the lumber used by Minnesota wood-products industries now comes from outside the state." Reforestation can only be accomplished through state and Federal ownership and management. "Private capital needs quick profits. To wait sixty or eighty years or even forty or fifty is beyond the endurance of most private capitalists." Public expenditures for reforestation must be made, even though the prospect of direct return is small, because of the necessity of checkmating the anarchic private enterprise of land colonizers, and of withdrawing unproductive land from settlement. The state "must protect public waters and game resources" and can save itself large sums that would otherwise have to be spent on state aid and in public relief for scattered settlers and their schools and roads." In short, the dilemma created by private initiative and ownership approaches the scale of disaster from which the only escape is collectivism.

2. The approaching extinction of the state's second major industry, mining. "The state must so plan its mining industry as to perpetuate it as long as possible. This suggests the necessity of continuous effort to discover new bodies of ore and also of unremitting study of the problem of beneficiating low grade ores. . . . It is generally believed that the high grade ores cannot last much longer than a generation more. . . . The mines are becoming mechanized and unless they should enjoy a tremendous boom are not likely to need many new employees." These quotations describe a similar dilemma and imply a similar solution—collectivism.

3. The spread of tax delinquency and consequent nar-

rowing of the tax base in the cutover counties where "the total number of acres delinquent for one or more years is probably close to 10,000,000." Urging the need for social and economic planning to make these counties fiscally self-sufficient and correct the present reversal of the normal economic flow, the report says: "The conditions now prevailing in the cutover region are such that to avoid further suffering, discouragement and despair, the state must take a hand in the situation." In other words, spend public money to liquidate the intolerable economic and social consequences of individualistic exploitation. The authors of the report remark that "the American land policy of the nineteenth century may be summed up in two phrases, private ownership and immediate exploitation." In executing this policy the government made a free gift to the state of 8,486,000 acres and to the railroads, directly or indirectly, of 11,114,000 acres. In the northern half of the state much of this land, being now stripped of its forests, burned over, and eroded, is tax delinquent and must soon go back into the hands of the counties and the state. More of it must be bought back from private owners to round out the program of reforestation and flood and erosion control.

4. Minnesota has exhibited the dubious beauties of "subsistence farming" for many years in the cutover counties. Over half the farms are either part-time enterprises in which the owner is losing his former source of cash income from forest industries, or produce little more than what is needed for consumption on the farm. The report warns that "if unemployed men are encouraged to go on the land in large numbers they will inevitably come into

competition with other farmers in an overworked industry."

5. Reforestation is necessary not merely to restore the economic self-sufficiency of the cutover areas (only a very low level of self-sufficiency is envisaged by the report) but to control floods and erosion and raise the water level. "Even before the current dry cycle measurements taken in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin indicated that the level of underground water had lowered some fourteen feet in the eighty years following settlement—an average lowering per decade of 1.73 feet."

6. The population figures would seem to reflect significantly the implications of the other economic and social data. In the sixteen cutover counties the population is now static or declining. "No one could have predicted that from 1920 to 1930 there would be practically no increase." Hence schools were established, roads built and debts contracted which can no longer be sustained. The report estimates that there was a loss by emigration of 110,000 people during the decade preceding 1930. Moreover, "Minnesota's population is aging rather rapidly—distinctly more rapidly than that of the country as a whole."

The drift of the analysis and of the recommendations is all in the direction of a functional collectivism as the only possible escape from the dilemmas created by individualist exploitation of land, forest, and mineral resources. Failure to adopt this course, the report implies, will lead to far more critical conditions than those which the authors describe. But as in Wisconsin the detailed recommendations

—zoning, purchase of land by state and Federal authorities, changes in assessment and tax policies—are obviously, even ludicrously, inadequate to prevent the future crisis which is clearly envisaged. For example, the report states that "there are in Minnesota some 21,900,000 acres of so-called forest land for most of which there is little competitive demand. . . . From these millions of acres of forest land we must select the acres best suited to forest management and concentrate our efforts upon restoring their productivity. The rest of the land must be maintained at a minimum of public expense *until such time as the people of the state can afford to place it under management.*"

The italics are mine. "Until such time!" There is no pie in the sky of Minnesota's future under capitalism and every intelligent person I met admitted it. Nor is there any prospect that the state can buy its way out of bankruptcy and muddle its way through by a program of gradually developed state socialism, which is what Governor Olson would seem to have in mind but for his opportunistic adherence to the Farmers Union line and other strictly capitalistic economic whimsies. It is too late for that. It would be too late even if Minnesota's dilemma could be abstracted from the total dilemma of the national and international economy, which of course it can't be. The report skates around this obstinate fact as best it can. Except for a few painfully uncritical references to Secretary Wallace's scarcity promotion program it makes little attempt to place Minnesota in the time and space context of the total national and international situation.

One of the report's saddest attempts at a kind of debilitated optimism is its reference to the "recreation indus-

tries" of northern Minnesota which are growing. Recreation is a function of leisure. Leisure is a function of economic security. Unemployment is not leisure. And what the report envisages is more unemployment, that being the only kind of capitalistic production which cannot be restricted by any program of scarcity. Does Minnesota expect and "plan" for a future of industrial and agricultural feudalism in which the upper bourgeoisie of the cities will rehabilitate the ravaged public domain by doles in the form of fishing licenses and guide fees?

I found this rather macabre illusion to be quite general throughout the country. Dude ranches are increasing throughout the West, although their fees are lower. In the Big Bend country of southwest Texas the impoverished cattlemen and their wives were looking forward to the completion of the projected International Park so that they can stop raising beef for less than the cost of production and begin selling hot dogs along the new highway.

The Terrible Swede, I reflected, would do well to rub his nose into some of the basic realities chastely touched upon in the report of his own appointed experts. Yet again, it is necessary to give the Governor due credit for appointing competent experts, as he did; acting upon the implications of their findings is another matter—certainly not a matter for a politician to take lightly.

Struck by the omissions, inhibitions and contradictions evident in this and other public documents of Governor Olson's administration, I sought out a distinguished man of science who has had a hand in the planning activities

stimulated by the President's Committee on National Resources.

The President, he opined, had been a bit brash in propounding the Big Idea of planning. He had cut himself a mouthful which he would find much too big to chew, politically speaking.

In the nature of the case, he thought, the officially appointed planners, in Minnesota as elsewhere, could do little more than a descriptive job. This, however, would be serviceable, since the mere ordering of the material would establish the necessary direction for the social process to take. Much was already known and intelligently directed research would reveal the rest. It would be possible to fit the jig-saw puzzle together, descriptively.

As to positive, planned action, the possibilities were very limited within the existing social, economic and political framework. It was clearly possible to control syphilis and diphtheria. He wasn't sure of much else.

On the whole, we were, as a people, tragically ill-equipped to meet the demands of the crisis. All our training has been specialist; whereas more and more synthesis is required. He considered the radical movement notably deficient in this respect. It had barely begun the task of building up the necessary body of doctrine. In fact he considered the categories of "radical" and "conservative" to be rather inept. The true division lay between realists and romantics. We had all too few realists. Our cultural heritage was very thin in this respect, chiefly because of the history and nature of American colonization.

The country was settled by dispossessed persons, adventurers and refugees from lost causes. They made a con-

scious effort to repudiate and forget the framework of the society from which they had come. The new values which they erected were pecuniary aggrandizement, a love of skills, and a pioneer individualist self-sufficiency.

These values were largely antithetical to those which must be developed if we are to deal with the present economic dilemma. Fundamental to this dilemma, he thought, is the newly emerged phenomenon of an approximately static world population. If ever a man was crazy, it was Malthus, who, he thought, came by his craziness naturally —his father was a follower of Rousseau. The second major factor was the national self-sufficiency forced upon us by the erection of foreign trade barriers. This factor was aggravated by the current domination of fascist and other nationalistic governments, but tended to be made permanent by the effect of the third major factor, which was technology. The ease with which modern science devised ersatzes—substitutes—tended to break down cost of production differentials.

The general conception to which the consideration of these factors had led him was that of "plastic planning." We must be prepared to deal flexibly with a series of variable or unknown quantities; the future development of technology, particularly, was quite unpredictable.

Planning was a gambler's chance and you had to take it. Although he admitted that as a planner, he was handed a defective deck of cards—only forty cards, not a full deck. The metabolism of the economy was very low. Too low for planned, gradualist resuscitation and reconstruction? He wasn't sure. He had done the best he could with the deck which had been handed to him.

Naturally, a few basic premises had to be agreed upon before anyone could discuss the changes in the economy, and in the distribution of population which planning involved. Was Minnesota to be tied up with the national economy or was it to be regional? What functional regions could be envisaged? Was the ultimate objective to be collectivist-Socialist or controlled capitalist? How was the paradox of centralization and decentralization, both necessary and coördinate, to be resolved?

For himself, he had arrived at few unqualified answers to anything. He was a realist, not a romantic. Jovially, he wished the radicals luck. They would need plenty of it, he thought.

Like other philosophic sanctums, the planner's office had only one door. And, like Omar, I came out by the same door wherein I went. But I enjoyed the visit and on leaving I reflected that again Olson had to be given credit; he had given the planning job to one of the ablest men in the state.

WHEN THE RAINS FAIL

18

DROUGHT AND "PLANNING"

THREE hours southwest of Minneapolis I found myself in one of the primary drought areas of Minnesota. For the next two weeks, in South and North Dakota and northeastern Montana, I was never out of the drought region. Rain was falling at intervals as the climate cycle achieved its long-awaited wet turn.

To many today the drought may seem dated—a thing of the past. But the underlying problem the drought presented remains, has lost none of its relevance. In fact it is crucial with respect to any program of planning.

I was a reporter, concentrated upon following the second hand of politics and the minute hand of farmer and labor protest and agitation. But it didn't take me long to realize that I couldn't begin to think about any aspect of the economic, social, and political situation of the drought regions until I had the answer to one very fundamental question: Was there any measured and established periodicity to the drought cycle—had the meteorologists, the climatologists, perfected any reliable method of long-time climate prediction?

If the answer was yes, then planning was theoretically possible, although only, it seemed to me, within the framework of a socialized economy. But if the answer was no? I reached the Pacific coast before anybody was able to

answer that question for me with any degree of assurance; and the scientist who spent a couple of hours trying to enlighten me was none too comforting.

The answer, as usual, was yes and no. If there was any periodicity to the drought cycle of the eastern slope of the Rockies, it had not yet been established. Probably there was no definite periodicity. The eleven-year and forty-five-year cycles tentatively sketched by some of the scientists who had been working on the problem were possibly statistical mirages.

So far, the answer was no. But the available records were sufficiently accurate and extended over a long enough span so that it was possible to estimate approximately the long time *climate hazards* to which various portions of the American continent were subject. On the basis of these estimates it might be possible to plan—or at least to plot areas where non-irrigated agriculture might be considered practicable and profitable and other areas where the hazard was predictably too great to warrant the expenditure of labor and capital.

You had to establish a norm, of course, before you could write "marginal" and "submarginal" on your map in terms of rainfall. You had to take into account what might be done to restore the subsoil moisture by means of dams, reforestation, erosion control, shelter belts, etc. And you had to determine your frame of economic measurement—was it to be regional, national, continental, or international?

All this before any kind of political and administrative effort could be much more than emergency patchwork in any scientific, long-time perspective. Should the eastern

slope of the Rockies be evacuated? Elwood Mead, United States Reclamation Commissioner, had incautiously permitted himself this ominous speculation and had promptly followed it up by a reassuring correction. I understood why when I talked to some of the farmers in the drought areas. Even when much of their top-soil had blown all the way to New York they didn't want to leave. They refused to believe that nature had deserted them, that the cards of climate were stacked against them. They had grown bumper crops in the past and would do so again. Just one or two good years would put them back on their feet. This was the best land in America.

Well, the farmers of Chippewa County, Minnesota, had had a good year in 1932 when their black, fertile fields produced a bumper crop. *It almost ruined them, they told me, because their corn was "taken away from them" at 12 cents a bushel and their oats at 7 cents a bushel.* Obviously, when the climatologists got through unscrewing the inscrutabilities of nature and estimating climate hazards, the planners would still have the hazards of the market under capitalism to deal with. And the current method adopted by Secretary Wallace, of compounding the niggardliness of nature by plowing under "surplus" crops, didn't seem very bright, either to me or to the farmers, although they had sourly plowed under their crops, taken their reduction allotments, and sold their starving cattle to the government—there was nothing else for them to do.

The Chippewa County farmers were equally critical of other aspects of the government's emergency program. When I was there, they told me that in Chippewa, and in four other neighboring counties, there was no seed, no

feed, and not enough roughage to last two months. But the FERA, I pointed out, was supposed to furnish relief feed for their cattle. Yes, they answered, but only for the subsistence quota of ten units which was all the government allowed the farmer. A cow is a unit; a horse is a unit; four pigs are a unit; a hundred chickens are a unit. Figure that out for yourself and see how much live stock that gave one of those southern Minnesota farmers who, on the average, cultivates about 160 acres of the richest soil in America. Furthermore, the monthly allowance for stock feed was $25, but that allowance was apparently based on the June prices of 35 to 40 cents a bushel for corn and 30 to 35 cents a bushel for oats. Corn delivered in that area was then bringing 87 to 90 cents a bushel and oats 50 cents to 55 cents a bushel.

The result was that the farmers weren't able to feed their cows enough to keep them in production. Nor were they able to feed their horses enough so that they could be taken out of the barn to work out that relief, for stock relief, like human relief, had to be worked out.

Most of the farmers had kept more than their "subsistence quota" of live stock. They were obliged to, if they expected to get a cream check, which was their only source of cash income. They had to buy food for their families; the hot winds that swept the prairies that summer had burned the kitchen gardens as well as the grain and the hay.

Yet the farmers struggled to keep their herds. When the government was buying drought cattle they didn't sell as many as they might have sold. They were in the dairy business, and without cattle, how could they pay their

debts and keep off relief? (About a quarter of the farmers in Chippewa County were already on relief.) They weren't "subsistence farmers"—in fact they yelled bloody murder when the phrase was uttered. Before the drought they had made out passably well in the dairy business and they hoped to get back into it. So they kept as many cows as they dared, hoping against hope to be able to feed them. In Chippewa County, about 25 per cent of the stock were disposed of to the government or by private sale, the mortgage holder getting most of the proceeds: $14 on a $20 cow. So that the farmer's chattel assets shrunk by about 25 per cent while his debts, because of government feed loans and other loans, were sharply increased. It was estimated that the farmers in that particular drought area were insolvent by about 30 per cent with respect to their chattel assets alone. And as for the land, it was estimated that the average mortgage against the land equaled the value of the land in the whole drought area. In Chippewa County, 75 per cent of the farmers were either tenants or had no equity in the property which they occupied. Yet Chippewa is normally one of the most prosperous counties in southwestern Minnesota. . . .

It was about this time that reassuring items began appearing in the Eastern papers to the effect that the consequences of the drought had been greatly exaggerated. In a general way, this may have been true, though I doubt it. If I had tried to tell those farmers anything like that, they would have run me out of the county.

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RUGGED INDIVIDUALS, DROUGHT, AND DAMS

"I'M pretty tough, I am. I say every man ought to stand on his own feet. I say, if a man didn't save in the good years so he can get along now, then let that man starve."

This Hooverian sentiment was uttered, not by a banker, but by an Aurora County farmer who sat opposite me in a Plankinton, South Dakota, coffee-pot. He had just finished telling me that Aurora County had had just two really good crops in fourteen years, and that his quarter section of land was powdery-dry to a depth of fifteen feet and over.

Carefully removing a load of South Dakota real estate from my sleeve, so it wouldn't get in the coffee, I remarked mildly that if this rule were applied at the moment, it would have the effect of reducing the population of the county by 50 per cent. He didn't believe it. They'd get along somehow if they had to—it would do those loafers good to do a little work for a change. What work? The farmers had sold their starving stock to the government. Practically the only source of income was government-financed relief work, and the majority of the farmers not only had no savings left but were mortgaged beyond the value of their land and chattels. . . . Nevertheless, he per-

sisted, the government was doing too much—was interfering too much with business.

I stepped out in the street and observed that, in fact, business seemed to be going on much as usual. The stores in this one-street village displayed the usual authentic adaptations of styles in women's wearing apparel. The strolling flappers, some of whom seemed to have more than a trace of Indian blood in their veins, shrilled to each other "Vas you dere, Sharlie?" and other Broadway catch lines hot off the radio. Nobody was starving, so far as I could learn, or even very apprehensive. Yet plenty of people would certainly starve if the relief allotments ceased. And there was excellent ground for future apprehension. For example, because there was no grain or forage, the farmers had sold their cattle to the government at prices ranging from $8 to $20 a head—normally a good steer brings $60 to $100. Having sold their capital assets what would they do next year, even if the hoped-for heavy snows and rains came at last? Would the government sell them back their cattle? At what price? And what about the bewildering incubus of debt, both government and private, under which these farmers were staggering? Would not the suspended foreclosures be resumed the moment the farmers got a crop?

Most of the farmers admitted these dilemmas. Yet I was repeatedly warned not to write a word against the fair name of South Dakota. Give them two successive years of rain, they insisted, and this country would bounce back into prosperity. The land was good, given rain. It was the "best land in the world" and they intended to stick with it.

From Sioux Falls to Chamberlain my route led through the heart of the Northwest drought area. In a year of bumper crops it must be magnificent indeed. When I saw it, it looked much like the arid plateau land of the Southwest, except that instead of sand, sagebrush and cactus, the fields lining the road were rich, powdery loam, stubbled with stunted cornstalks. The few remaining cattle were permitted to roam at will in the cornfields, which the hot winds had destroyed. From Sioux Falls to Plankinton and beyond the country was almost flat—an undulant ocean of burned and beggared fertility on which the white farm houses and red silos floated like derelicts. The buildings were good and most of the barnyards were well tended. Clearly this was fat country once. If one doubted it one had only to finger the black topsoil with which the wind had filled the roadside ditches almost to the brim. One of the principal relief jobs was to scrape up this loam and dump it back on the fields. I saw this being done all the way from Montevideo, Minn., to Vivian, S. D. And everywhere dotting the landscape I saw the stacks of tumble weed—almost the only crop that year—which was being given to the stock in lieu of anything else.

Here and there rain had fallen—enough to make pools by the roadside. But a few miles farther it would be dry. At one filling station the proprietor pumped water from a cistern and told me he had to buy it and haul it about five miles. Most of the shallow wells were dry. Those still flowing ran anywhere from three hundred to a thousand feet deep.

Once this country was dotted with lakes. A few years ago, Red Lake, near Chamberlain, went dry. The town

drilled artesian wells and filled it. But the artesian wells stopped flowing and now Red Lake is dry again.

So narrow is the margin of moisture on which this country lives that one could almost say the relief load was an index of the water level. Brule County, which borders the bluffs of the Missouri River, had had almost no rain. The relief director told me that almost half the population were on relief and that the load was bound to increase. He had been a banker and recalled the crash of 1920 and 1921 when all the banks in Chamberlain, the county seat, had failed, because $100 steers were selling at $20. There was one bank left in Chamberlain, with about $250,000 in deposits, as compared with four times that in good years.

This country has good roads, built with state and Federal money. In Chamberlain I talked to an ancient Swedish cattleman—one of the pioneer settlers—who cursed these roads with fluency and unction. It was the roadside ditches, more than anything else, he insisted, that had drained this country. (He was less than half right; it was chiefly the wells and the plowing up of the buffalo grass.) The land, he said, should never have been sectioned off for wheat raising anyway. It was not wheat country, but cattle country—the best cattle country in the world. The grass was wonderful, and the alfalfa. In the good years he had grown ten times as much alfalfa as he knew what to do with. Now he didn't have a spear on his place. The roads had done it—please tell the Federal government not to let the local politicians spend relief money on roads. The shelter belt? Yes, maybe. But first, build dams. They must bring the water level back. It was unthinkable to abandon this country—to "give it back to the Indians."

Once the old man had owned 3,200 acres. Like everybody else, he said, he had speculated in the boom period and got caught. It was true that speculative wheat farming during and immediately after the War had done much both to ruin the farmers and indirectly to lower the water level. In Sioux Falls they told me of a farmer who had a well-developed 240-acre farm and no debts. He came in town one day and met a banker. The banker urged him to buy an adjoining tract of 160 acres and undertook to finance him. Within a year, according to the Anglican priest who told me the story, the farmer was occupying the place merely as a tenant, until the banker could dispose of the stock. The farmer had lost everything.

At the state capitol in Pierre I found that reliable weather statistics go back only to 1893. Since then the curve of rainfall, as sketched for me by the state engineer, shows three major dips at approximately ten year intervals, each drought valley being deeper than the last.

There appeared also to be some historical evidence warranting the belief that in North and South Dakota, a larger swing between wet and dry alternates over approximately 40-year periods. There is Tepee Rock in Stump Lake, which is near Devil's Lake in northern North Dakota, which showed itself in 1855, again in 1894 and now is again in view. And there is the testimony of Alexander Henry, who came down from the north in 1806 and reported that the lakes in the vicinity of Minot, N. D., were shallow and alkaline—their present condition. And on the wet side, there was a time, in the homesteading days, when

big boats came all the way down the Red River to Wahpeton.

In some parts of North Dakota the water level had dropped as much as forty feet. In wide areas of formerly productive wheat land there remained practically no subsoil moisture. That meant that the rainfall must not only be much greater than it had been during the preceding five years, but that it must be nicely distributed over the growing period of the crops. Otherwise, with a few weeks of drought, the hot winds shrivel and flatten the grain for which the ground holds no reserve of moisture.

The shallow wells had dried up in many areas; even the artesian wells, because of excessive tapping, had ceased to flow. Grain, which is comparatively deeply rooted, transpires many times as much moisture as the buffalo grass. It was agreed by all the experts I talked to in both South and North Dakota, that much of the land, especially west of the Missouri, should never have been plowed, and the plans of the Federal government envisage turning much of this land back to grazing.

From Pierre to Bismarck I drove north a few miles east of the Missouri, following approximately the line of the projected "Shelter Belt." I drove at sixty miles an hour over good roads, but the country is so vast, so flat, so featureless, that I seemed to be rowing a clumsy boat across a limitless ocean. At ten-mile intervals a town would lift into sight: a water tank and three grain elevators, one gray and two red. Ten miles farther, another town, a water tank, and three grain elevators, one gray, two red. The roads follow the section lines; almost every half section

has a small three- to five-room house, a large barn and sometimes a shed or two. Most of the cattle seemed to be gone and there were few horses; those that remained seldom lifted their noses from the brown sod that was burned and nibbled closer than any golf course. The weather was mild, but there was little pasture. Never before in their memory, the farmers told me, had they failed to have enough feed and pasture to carry their stock through the winter.

There were trees: about one to every square mile. Doubtless the little boys of the region refer to it as "the tree," and make ceremonial pilgrimages to climb it. Also there were occasional house groves planted by the early homesteaders.

So dry as it is, the foresters who planned the shelter belt could prove that trees do grow in this region. They had started preliminary work already at Bottineau, N. D. They plan to set out cottonwoods, Chinese elms, and Russian olive, making a close growth with a conical contour that will best survive under conditions of extreme drought and will provide the maximum of interruption to the sweep of the winds.

Trees, the return of much of the semi-arid acreage to grazing, and dams to raise the water level—that was the program projected by Federal and state authorities. But only a bare beginning had been made. With CCC help, North Dakota had built a total of 160 small dams within two years. But that is only a drop in the big bucket of conserved water that will be required to have any important effect in bringing back the water level. One engineer estimated that about 75,000 of these small dams would be

required. They could be built and the expense would not be prohibitive, especially if they were built on contract; he considered CCC labor, figured at $3.00 a day, to be too expensive. A large scale program, approximately adequate, would cost about $8,000,000—only a little more than the annual appropriation for road building in the state.

Thus far, in dealing with the drought-stricken Dakotas, I have written as if they were a-political; as if the second hand of politics had stopped. It hadn't. In North Dakota, especially, it was gyrating at a furious rate when I was there, and I shall now attempt to sketch some of the statesmen, in and out of office, who were trying to ride it.

20

DROUGHT AND DEMAGOGY

BY the time I reached Bismarck, N. D., I was prepared to risk a tentative generalization based on my talks with farmers, farm leaders, relief directors, and local politicians. It ran to this effect:

The drier this country gets, the dirtier its politics, just as the withering lakes have become more alkaline.

It must be emphasized, however, that scummy politics was a secondary, rather than a primary, consequence of the drought. For two years North Dakota had sucked at the paps of the New Deal. Most of the money in circulation was relief money of one sort or another. And since the administration of relief is an affair of government, most of the jobs were, directly or indirectly, political jobs.

In a single year North Dakota received nearly $35,000,000 from the AAA: $24,000,000 in the wheat reduction program, $8,000,000 for cattle, $2,000,000 on the corn-hog program. In addition, the FERA expenditure for ten months totaled about $13,000,000.

Even a political structure of unexampled integrity and efficiency would tend to deliquesce because of the temptations incident to the administration of such huge, necessitated doles. And as it happened, North Dakota and its Non-Partisan League were in no condition to stand the strain.

In 1933 North Dakota had drought, grasshoppers, and Langerism. In 1934 the drought was worse—so bad, the farmers said, that the grasshoppers gave up and went elsewhere. Grasshoppers can't eat politics. But Bill Langer soared like a hawk over the stricken prairies, the eagles of the national administration flew to the rescue, and the ensuing battle was far from edifying.

Edifying or not it is worth some effort to extract the essential meaning of what happened in North Dakota. Similar battles are being fought, and still to be fought, in many state capitals in America.

First, a word about the North Dakota electorate, with whom I had some chance to get acquainted en route to Bismarck, the capital. They seemed admirable people on the whole: simple, hard-working Swedes, Norwegians, German-Russians, and early pioneer Americans, with the strain of plowing in their shoulders and the weather in their faces. When I was there, they were staying on their farms to conserve gasoline except when they were on work relief, as most of them were. The news came to them via their country weeklies and the radio. They discussed the news, shook their heads, and frequently came to the most fantastic conclusions. They seemed easy prey for demagogues. The sources of economic and political power were obscure to them. They thought of "right" and "justice." It was right and just that they should get "cost of production" for their crops. It was right that the government should come to their aid when they were desperate. Who was the government? Was Bill Langer the government? He was an eloquent, passionate speaker. He said he was their friend. The warmth of his handshake was contagious.

He could spend ten minutes in a little town and in that time shake everybody by the hand. It was a strange world, and the sources of power were mysterious. A. C. Townley was to save them in 1918. But where was Townley? In Minnesota, helping the Stalwarts to fight Olson. Who, then, was the Non-Partisan League? Who was honest and who was crooked, the Langerites or the "Rumpeteers"?

With this participating audience of groundlings in mind, we are ready to introduce William Langer, star performer in North Dakota's tragi-comedy of drought and demagogy. He is, or was, a lawyer, with a $40,000-a-year practice extending all over the state; also owner of 20,000 acres of wheat land. In 1918 he was elected Attorney General on the Non-Partisan League ticket. But a few years later he published a history of the Non-Partisan League in which he bitterly attacked the League policies and his associates of the earlier period, and ran unsuccessfully for governor on the ticket of the Independent Voters Association. In 1932 he was back in the graces of the League and was elected Governor by a tremendous majority in a landslide that carried with it complete control of both branches of the legislature and practically all the important state offices.

Langer's inauguration was delayed while he lay seriously ill in the hospital at Bismarck. He recovered and public sympathy flowed to him. He demanded and got extraordinary veto powers from the legislature and by using this power staffed the major state departments with his personal henchmen. To meet the attacks of the opposition press, he launched *The Leader* and financed it by a 5 per

cent levy on the salaries of state employees. The paper became his personal organ. When the FERA got going in North Dakota the relief checks went out labeled "William Langer Relief Fund"—until Washington stopped him. He declared an embargo on the exportation of wheat from North Dakota which three months later was declared unconstitutional. Meanwhile, according to testimony later developed at the trial, Langer was speculating in wheat futures. After vetoing a mortgage moratorium law passed by the legislature, Governor Langer declared a moratorium by proclamation. But his political enemies charged that this moratorium was relaxed or tightened to suit the personal advantage of the Governor and his political machine.

Meanwhile the Non-Partisan League was split between the Langerites and the faction led by Thoreson and Lieutenant-Governor Olson, and the New Deal was very much involved in the squabble. FERA investigators came to Bismarck early in 1934 and soon Langer faced an indictment charging him with coercing FERA employees into paying that 5 per cent *Leader* assessment, the amount involved, however, being only $184. About this time, Senator Nye denounced Langer on the floor of the Senate. He was tried and convicted, but ten days later swept the primaries of the Non-Partisan League, obtaining a vote bigger than that given to the candidates of all other parties combined.

Langer was tried, convicted, and sentenced to eighteen months in the penitentiary, but a year later the conviction was reversed on appeal by the Federal District Court. Meanwhile the State Supreme Court ruled that his conviction automatically removed Langer from office. After

a moment of tension, while Federal troops from Fort Lincoln occupied the capital, Lieutenant Governor Olson seated himself and proceeded as rapidly as possible to break up the Langer machine.

In the campaign of 1934 the "Rumpeteers" of the League held a separate convention and nominated Thoreson for Governor. The Langerites, under pressure from Langer, rather unwillingly nominated Mrs. Langer. The Democrats nominated Tom Moodie and the pressure of the New Deal handouts was brought to bear to force his election—farmers got their corn-hog checks just before election with mimeographed pleas to register their political gratitude at the polls. To combat this, Langer's Highway Commissioner bought a fleet of new cars and the Langer henchmen burned up the roads bringing in the vote. Langer, if he had been able to run, or almost any other male nominated by the Langerites, probably would have won. As it was, Mrs. Langer lost by a narrow margin —I talked to German and Scandinavian farmers all over the state who said simply: "I vouldn't vote for a vooman."

It was pure power politics, patronage politics, staged in a country pauperized and made desperate by debts, grasshoppers and drought. What happened was that in North Dakota the New Deal had something like a budding Huey Long on its hands, and got his scalp just in time. There was perhaps some qualitative difference between the demagogy of Langer and the demagogy of Jim Farley's local satraps, but the similarity of methods was impressively close. Principles? Programs? North Dakota has had rain since then, and perhaps such frail and lovely growths will have a better chance now.

Much significant detail has necessarily been omitted from the foregoing sketch. I complete it with brief portraits of three of the star actors in the drama.

Bill Langer was president of his class and valedictorian when he graduated from Columbia University some thirty years ago. His classmates noted opposite his picture in the class annual that he was the "noisiest student, the most popular, the biggest politician," thereby executing a rough blueprint for his subsequent career. Langer is a big, powerfully built man in his early fifties. The head is small, the features hawklike and molded by the lines of illness—he suffers from diabetes. He has extraordinary emotional force and projects all of it. His rôle when I interviewed him was that of a tribune of the people, bludgeoned into obscurity by the slanders of the minions of the corrupt vested interests whom he had attacked. If the conviction is reversed, I asked, would he try to come back, to run for Governor or United States Senator in 1936? "What's the use?" he shrugged. It was the gesture of the wounded gladiator, and I was moved. Demagogue or not, Langer is a great histrion with the faculty of believing enormously in himself and in any rôle he assumes. This is the type, I reflected, to which power will gravitate more and more in this declining phase of our democracy.

North Dakota has a new, expensive state capitol building much resembling that in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and even more beautiful. In the Governor's office sat Acting-Governor Ole Olson, mildly pleased with himself because

of the commendations he received for his handling of the Langer affair, but also mildly uncomfortable. It was hard for him to act like a governor, hard for him to act like anything except what he was: a short, stubby, respectable, kindly Norwegian farmer. His hands were much more used to gripping a pitchfork than to signing state papers. He fussed over his mail, not trying to seem important, but because Langer left a lot of tangled affairs to straighten out, and Ole was trying to be conscientious about it, just as he was conscientious about his barnyard.

When Ole visited back in Eddy County, where he homesteaded in 1895, the local weekly made quite a fuss about him. Ole showed me the clippings. I asked about Langer and he sputtered: "Traitor, crook." He didn't understand Langer; he thought him a little mad. He preferred to talk about farming, about the drought.

"In Eddy County for the first time we don't take out the binder. We mow our crop—what we have." And the farmers were losing their farms—75 per cent were now renters. "I don't tink the Lord Almighty ever intend so much land be owned by one man, by corporation."

I suggested that nationalization of the land with lease-title based on use would be better and he glowed. Yes, that would be better. We must change things, but we must be civilized and do it by orderly process.

Ole showed me a framed picture of his father when the latter took his oath of citizenship. Evidently it meant a good deal to him. I did not think it fair to question him too closely about the uses of citizenship in the present state of our democracy.

Who broke the power of Bill Langer? I, insisted Sam Clark, founder and editor of *Jim Jam Jems* and journalistic nemesis of North Dakota's ex-Governor.

"Up to the time that he was indicted and brought to trial," declaimed editor Clark, "we shot writhen bolts of the fire of truth into Langerism." The bolts, which continued to descend during and after the campaign, consisted of large quantities of Sam's pioneer rhetoric, plus canceled checks and other documents designed to convince the voters of Langer's political and professional iniquity.

I interviewed Mr. Clark and found him to be a tweedy, flowing-tied personality, a sort of Western Walter Winchell. He had made money out of *Jim Jam Jems,* a mélange of sex and political scandal stuff, and lost it in a gold mine in Culver City. Returning to his home state of North Dakota, where he was once associated in newspaper work with Tom Moodie, he was at first talked of as a possible editor for Langer's paper. Sam thought better of that however, and choosing the side of the angels, edited first the *State Record* and then a monthly pamphlet-sized magazine called *Red Ink*. Sam assured me that he had been of material assistance to the New Deal emissaries in pinning something on Langer, and I believed him. Later, when I was in Louisiana, I wondered why the administration hadn't sent him into the Kingdom of the Kingfish along with the income tax inspectors. He is, of course, a strictly disinterested patriot and among other talents has a golden radio voice. One evening while I was in Bismarck I heard him deliver a broadcast on the Nobility of Motherhood that must have rolled the farmers' wives out of their rocking chairs all the way from Minot to Grand Forks.

21

THE EXILES OF FORT PECK

FROM Williston, N. D., home town of North Dakota's newspaperman-Governor, the highway runs north of the Missouri River through semi-arid region of flowing slopes and shallow arroyos: cattle and sheep country mostly, although in favored areas a good deal of wheat was produced in the wet years.

The bold, bad days of the frontier were a comparatively recent memory in the minds of even middle-aged people. I heard gorgeous tales that made me wish the writers of "westerns" had stuck closer to their source material. One of them, with which a coffee-pot acquaintance regaled me, ended this way:

"I heard three shots and started a-running toward the saloon. There was that —— —— little pimp folded up over the bar rail with his head in the spittoon. I turned him over but I couldn't see nothing and I asks, 'Did you see the diamond on Wilbur?'

" 'No,' says the barkeep. 'The chief of police got there first.' "

Another variant of the Frankie and Johnnie saga, I reflected, and wished that I could have stayed to gather further data. But I was headed for Fort Peck, Montana, where the army was building the biggest earth dam in the world across the Missouri River. I had heard much

about the model town of Fort Peck, which the President had visited in the spring of 1934, and was prepared to see an example of planning on the grand scale.

From Glasgow the army had built a good oiled road running about twenty miles south into the desert and ending on the bluff above the dam site, which was located at a big bend of the Missouri, in a country of uncompromising bleakness and aridity. There the army, urged on by the need of giving some sort of employment to the drought-stricken cattlemen and sheep herders of eastern Montana, had, in less than a year, improvised a work camp for a project which at its peak employed over 7,000 people. On one side of the central plaza were the pink concrete administration buildings designed to house the permanent administrative staff. The long sides of the rectangle were occupied by dormitories for the women employees and a temporary hotel for both men and women; at the further end a store, garage, motion picture theater, and recreation center completed the picture of what appeared to be a well-conceived and well-administered model town.

I visited the store and continued to get good impressions, although I wondered why it wasn't a coöperative. But the prices of the goods offered by the concessionaire were no higher than in Glasgow, twenty miles away on the main line of the highway and the railroad. The barracks were better than those of the average construction camp. Water and sewage arrangements were admirable. The army officer I interviewed in the absence of Major Larkin, the District Engineer, was courteous and informative. I talked to some of the civilian engineers in charge

of various units of the huge construction job and there was impressive evidence that the technical engineering difficulties were being attacked and mastered with better than average drive and efficiency. . . .

It was not until I wandered outside the gates of the army's Spotless Town and talked to some of the workers employed on the project that I began to have doubts. Even later, when it became apparent that one of the most important aspects of the job had been badly muffed, I was in no haste to blame the army. Army officers execute orders. If Fort Peck has been pretty much of a headache, the departments at Washington were responsible, who gave the orders.

There was trouble at Fort Peck; it was clear there was bound to be more trouble. Trouble was implicit in the hopeless contradictions of the "planned" setup. But such was the inertia of "planning" under the New Deal that nothing was done, nothing was changed, until in June, 1935, the Fort Peck *Project News* printed the following editorial blast:

The New Deal as exemplified on the Fort Peck project is a ghastly joke. There has been this result. Every sanctity of human rights has been violated by the army and its greedy partner. By their "soviet" decree citizens are told where they must sleep, where they must eat. Families have been torn apart and the people's spirit has been undermined. The countryside has become a paradise for the honky-tonk, the prostitute and kindred vice mongers. . . .

The New Deal performance on the Fort Peck project has failed to live up to the Roosevelt promises. It is serving only to help those at the top and to push down those clinging pre-

cariously to the bottom rung of the ladder up which the people were to climb.

What? Was it the model community of Fort Peck of which the editor was speaking? The Spotless Town you saw in the rotogravure sections as proof that the President's great dream of planning was being fulfilled?

Yes, and the town was really spotless, much as described. The only trouble was that the workers couldn't afford to live in it, couldn't afford to even if they were single, which three-quarters of them were not, couldn't afford to even if Spotless Town provided adequate accommodations for families, which it did not. Where hundreds of them were living, where they were obliged to live if they were to live with and support their families, was not the Spotless Town of the Fort Peck reservation, but New Deal, Square Deal, Wheeler, Midway, Parkdale (there wasn't any park), Lakeside (there wasn't any lake)—a sprawling, pathetic slum-in-the-desert, which you never saw in the rotogravure sections, and the like of which has been rarely seen in America.

The army didn't want them to live there. Quite properly, it viewed these shack towns with distaste and alarm. They were without sewage facilities, and water came chiefly from shallow wells. The hazards of fire and epidemic were serious. So the army issued a ruling that 80 per cent of the 5,000 men then employed on the project must live in Spotless Town.

Immediately, the workers protested. Live in Spotless Town? At what price? A common laborer worked a forty-hour week at 50 cents an hour. But he didn't work every day, so that when he was obliged to pay a minimum of

$8.40 a week for board and lodging in the barracks, about half of his earnings were spent for his personal subsistence. What happened to his wife and children? They had to go on relief.

The protest of the workers, voiced at mass meetings and in petitions to Senator Wheeler, won action and after the Senator had called upon Secretary Dern the latter withdrew the barracks order. The workers stayed in their shacks, which was no solution whatever for the problem—not even a "plan."

Until, as a grim but logical sequel of the whole performance, scores of these shacks were washed away in a cloudburst that flooded the flats of the Missouri River. Nature evacuated the shack towns and the workers and their families were obliged to seek temporary refuge in Spotless Town on the bluff above and untouched by the storm.

Clearly, none of this would have happened if cheap but sanitary housing for families had been provided in the first place. The requirements were apparent from the beginning. Three-quarters of the workmen on the project were married men with dependents. They had to be in order to get jobs—the Montana law established this preference in order to accomplish a maximum reduction of the relief load. But figures showed that the army had provided accommodations for 3,456 single men in bunk houses and temporary and permanent residences for only 300 families. And the prices charged for these accommodations were quite out of line with the household budgeting of workers as recommended by government authorities. Even the civil service employees could scarcely afford to live there.

I talked to one of them who paid $35 a month for a five-room bungalow, plus fixed charges for water, gas, electricity, garbage removal and garage service, which brought the monthly total up to nearly $50.

The army had its official explanation of these contradictions. Traditionally, a construction camp in the wilderness is a job for single men and men who are prepared to abandon their families during the period of employment. Didn't the army post warnings in railroad stations that there were no adequate accommodations for families on the reservation? It did, and the families came anyhow. They built their shacks and the army, for well over a year, failed to compete them out of existence, as it could readily have done.

There was also an explanation. The cost of housing in Spotless Town had to be amortized over a period of four years—the estimated time needed to complete the job. By whom? By the workers who were asked to use and pay for that housing. But why in four years and why by the workers? Why wasn't adequate housing, at rates proportioned to the wages paid, a proper first charge on the total overhead of the job? I obtained no satisfactory answers to these questions. In effect, of course, the high charges were the government's method of chiseling the PWA wage scale, which the contractors were also chiseling at every opportunity.

Except for Wheeler and Lakeside, which are sprawled along the highway leading to the reservation, the ugly distemper of the shack towns was tucked away out of sight of casual visitors, mostly on the flat land below the dam

site. There were about a dozen of these towns, ranging in population from 50 to 1,200, with an approximate census in the Fort Peck area of around 10,000. About half the houses were one room shacks built of composition board and barn siding; some of these pioneers lived in automobile trailers and tents; one of them had dug and timbered a hole in the hillside. There was no sewage; every now and then the County health officer, reënforced by a sanitarian paid by FERA money, came around and condemned some of the outhouses; also some of the shallow wells, which were the chief source of water. In Wheeler, water was being peddled at fifty cents a barrel.

The county was without funds, but the health officer besought aid from the state, which being also broke, besought aid from the FERA. Eventually enough money was obtained to pay the salary of the sanitarian already mentioned. But neither the state, nor the county, nor the army had managed to achieve the obviously necessary preventive measure of inoculating the children of New Deal, Square Deal, Wheeler, etc., for typhoid. The county health officer had done his best. He had obtained inoculations at cost from the state health department and offered three shots at 25 cents a shot to the parents of the mushroom towns. But there were few takers—most of the workers on the job came there debt-ridden. The school population of Park Grove numbered 387, but only a negligible percentage of these children had been inoculated.

Spotless Town had a clinic, seemingly well-administered. The larger mushroom towns had attracted a few doctors, osteopaths and painless dentists. The doctor in Wheeler

told me that the week before he had been hurriedly summoned at midnight to one of those eight-by-twelve paperboard shacks. It was occupied by a man, his wife, and two children, one four years old and the other two. The children were sleeping on a shelf. The woman was in labor. Not wishing to make a delivery by the light of a pocket flashlight, the doctor succeeded, after much difficulty, in securing her admission to the hospital in Glasgow.

Does this seem a little excessive and un-American? I was told of a shack, eight by sixteen, occupied by two couples, one with four children and the other with two babies: also by two single men as boarders. I myself saw shacks where the congestion was only slightly less extraordinary.

When the exiles of Fort Peck started naming things the first name they considered for New Deal was Paradise Valley. Everything is relative and from some points of view their shack town was a lot better than what they offered them in Spotless Town on the bluff above. It was at least human. It permitted them to keep their families together. It permitted them—barring the changes of fire, flood, and epidemic—to pay their bills, reduce a few of their back debts, and recover a little of the self-respect of which idleness, insecurity, and dependence upon relief had robbed them. A cat skinner getting 75 cents a day told me that by cutting the cottonwood of the river bottom for fuel and other economies, he was able to keep his wife and two children for ten dollars a week. That, he pointed out, was better than spending almost as much for himself alone in the barracks of Spotless Town.

New Deal was less than a year old, but already it had achieved an accurate, if pathetic, parody of the American civilization. It had a radio repair shop, a movie palace, half a dozen small stores and restaurants, a real estate office, an osteopath, a dentist, and a beauty shoppe. It had half a dozen saloon dance halls and not all the taxi dancers were prostitutes. Many of them, just as on Broadway, were good girls engaged in supplementing the family income.

In short, New Deal was where life was better. The army had no authority there. Except for the tribute of land rent to the rancher who happened to own the section of bottom land below the dam site, the workers owned the town and ran it. They could and did make loud and critical references to the brass hats of the army. They could hold their own meetings and discuss among other things the bitter protest lodged by the Montana Federation of Labor concerning conditions at Fort Peck.

President James D. Graham of the Federation has charged that the investigation of Fort Peck by the Public Works Board of Labor Review was a whitewash; that the contractors on the job are constantly chiseling, and that "trick" wage scales were inserted in the contracts approved by the army, after the contracts were awarded.

It was charged at the hearing (and admitted by the Labor Review Board) that these scales permitted the employment of semi-skilled and unskilled labor for skilled workers' jobs at "helpers' " wages considerably below the level set in the contract for that type of work. This wage-chiseling defrauded the workers of $50,000 in just one week, according to an estimate presented by Graham. Protest was also made against the "speedup" as applied to

truck drivers, forcing them to race all day at dangerous and nerve-racking speeds.

In its report on the hearing, the Labor Review Board admitted that the type of chiseling protested against had been "brought to its attention from many different sections of the country." However, it declared its faith in the army's ability—and willingness—to remedy this situation, and closed with a hymn of praise to the uniformed engineers who, according to the Board, "had reason to be proud of" their work.

The winters are cold in Siberia, where the Soviet government sends its political prisoners to work out their sentences. The winter in northeastern Montana is also cold, very cold. Some years ago Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the Arctic explorer, made a speech in one of those frozen towns. He said it was warmer within the Arctic circle—and his audience hissed him. It was a good, middle-class, patriotic audience—not the exiles of Fort Peck, who are somewhat more realistic. They know what the climate is like in Fort Peck. They said that even the President, if he made another speech there, would run the chance of having his ears frosted.

22

THE GHOST IN THE COULEE

IT is a young ghost, and still, one imagines, very unhappy and bewildered. Its name, if ghosts have names, is William Rafts, farmer, aged twenty-nine, part owner of the lonely 200-acre homestead, lost in the gaunt emptiness of the Columbia River canyon, which comprised a part of the Grand Coulee dam site. One Sunday night, the week before Christmas, 1933, Will Rafts waited until the family had gone to bed; then he went out to the barn, fed the cattle, and hung himself.

The *Grand Coulee News* chronicled this simple and banal act in its issue of December 22, 1933; it also noted that the government was starting the condemnation proceedings necessary to acquire the land needed for preliminary work on the dam. The two items were intimately connected. Will Rafts killed himself the day before he was supposed to sign papers deeding the Rafts homestead to the government for $2,100. There were ten heirs to the estate. Some of them thought that Will should hold out for more, but Will told friends it was no use fighting the government. On the other hand, he quailed before the anticipated strife with the other heirs. And finally, when the homestead was sold, where would he go, what would he do?

The next morning Will Rafts' mother went out to feed

the chickens and found the body hanging from the rafter. With it there was a brief note: "Let this be a lesson to the rest of my family."

She didn't know what he meant; neither did the government representatives in charge of land purchase and condemnation in connection with the project. They knew only that such things sometimes happen when big government undertakings impinge upon the settled ways of living of a primitive population; there had been a similar episode in connection with the TVA project.

Anyway, there was no time to bother. The engineers were busy already; soon a spur of the Great Northern would push through the rattlesnake-infested sagebrush to the dam site; the Diesel-powered bulldozers would be chiseling roads along the face of the bluff; electric shovels would pare away a million yards of earth and rubble, down to the granite base on which the dam must be laid; the canyon would rock with man-made thunder and blaze at night with thousands of lights. Already, when Will Rafts went out to execute his obscure vicarious sacrifice, the boom town of Grand Coulee had spattered the cliff above with a fungus growth of tents and shacks; other towns were building—Coulee Center, Electric City, Rim Rock—while sixteen and twenty miles away the towns of Coulee City, Almira and Wilbur were enjoying the anticipatory prosperity of the boom.

Arrived at Grand Coulee, it was quickly apparent that Will was not the only ghost who haunted the Coulee. It was full of ghosts and some of them were very much alive: the ghosts of vested interests and ownership in land and water rights; the ghosts of "states' rights" and the rights of

minor political sub-divisions; the ghosts of two generations of American pioneers who had spent laborious lives trying with transient success to grow wheat and apples in the Columbia Basin: the ghosts of land speculators and developers who had exploited the American dream of conquest and individual aggrandizement.

All these ghosts and others are instantly materialized the moment the very idea of "planning" is broached, and no wonder. Because the one thing these ghosts have in common is the American dream of Get-Rich-Quick and Something-for-Nothing, to which the whole conception of planning is antithetical. In fact the job of the planners is theoretically and practically to exorcise these ghosts, wake the people out of their long dream that life is going to be better in terms of individual, unearned acquisition, and substitute a new dream of collective planning and effort. A social revolution would exorcise these ghosts, of course. But the New Deal was no social revolution. It had been forced to invoke the *idea* of planning because the old dream was quite evidently obsolete; also it had to make jobs. But it could not really plan; it had neither authority nor power to plan.

Jobs had been made for about 2,500 workers on the dam and a magnificent job of physical construction was well under way. The largest public works project of the Roosevelt administration, the low dam, now being built, will cost $63,000,000; and it is to be so constructed as to make it possible to erect upon this foundation the projected high dam which will cost $179,000,000. The high dam, with 2,647,000 installed horsepower, will represent the greatest power development known to be feasible in the

United States, and will supply water for the Columbia Basin irrigation project. The irrigation feature, which will bring 1,200,000 acres of fertile arid land into production, will cost an additional $214,000,000.

This, surely, is construction on the grand scale. Moreover, from the engineering point of view it appeared to be entirely feasible; countless studies had been made of the problem of supplying water to the Columbia Basin and Grand Coulee was the generally agreed upon solution. It was practicable to build the high dam, practicable to use the power generated at the dam to pump water into the great natural reservoir of the Coulee, practicable to pipe this conserved water to the arid but fertile flat lands of the Columbia Basin.

Under capitalism it is possible to plan and execute engineering solutions of almost any problem. The economic solutions are another matter. With respect to the Grand Coulee project, as with every other "planning" enterprise I encountered, any attempt to estimate costs and income—to measure economic practicability—becomes quickly lost in a sea of "ifs" and "buts," with the ghosts of the American Dream very much alive and gibbering.

The Columbia Basin Commission estimated that the total investment required to complete the Columbia Basin project, crediting revenues from power during construction, would be $260,000,000. Sales of power were expected ultimately to pay the whole cost of the dam construction and half the cost of the construction required for irrigation, leaving the settlers on the irrigated lands with annual per acre carrying charges of only $5.39, in addition to the cost of the land. According to the Spokane Chamber of

Commerce, land would be available to settlers at from $5.00 to $15.00 an acre. But these estimates were conditioned, first, upon the ability of the commercial market to absorb the huge power increment; second, upon the willingness and power of Federal and state governments to control land prices by condemnation and otherwise; third, by the state of the agricultural market during the fifty years required to complete the irrigation of those 1,200,000 dry acres. The assumptions of population increase were contradicted both by the current trend and the future estimates of the recognized authorities. The assumed need of more agricultural land was contradicted by the current policy of the AAA, by the steady reduction of the percentage of the population engaged in agricultural production (90 per cent in 1790, 20 per cent in 1930) and by the impact of agro-biology and agricultural engineering upon the already ruinous structure of agricultural economics under capitalism. In *Harper's* for August, 1935, Wayne Parrish and Harold F. Clark in an article entitled "Chemistry Wrecks the Farm," state that "half our farm population, by slightly increasing their efficiency of operation (an extremely simple matter) could produce 100 per cent of all agricultural products now entering trade. . . . The experts know that if *present* knowledge of farm operation were properly applied, the 1930 crops could be produced by only 5 per cent of the population." One wonders what level of man-hour agricultural productivity the army assumes when it estimates that the project, when completed, would increase the population of the Northwest by 1,403,000 and the taxable values of land and electric utility franchises by $217,484,300.

The assumed industrial expansion to be made possible by cheap power from Grand Coulee is equally speculative. In general, western industry is limited by freight rates to the western market; the experience of Tacoma and Seattle, where municipal power plants have lowered the current rates, has demonstrated this sufficiently. In a memorandum to the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Conference, J. D. Ross, Superintendent of Seattle's City Light, pointed out:

> Power can be gotten as cheaply at Tennessee Valley and it is scarcely to be assumed that the Federal government will discriminate in rates between the Tennessee Valley, Boulder Canyon, and Columbia rates for power.
>
> Let us assume that it might do so to coax industries westward in spite of the protest of the eastern manufacturer. Suppose that large blocks of power would be actually sold cheaper by one or even two mills. It is plain that that difference in price must overcome all handicaps of freight, price of labor, and of raw material.

In the same memorandum Ross concedes some validity to the contention of the Grand Coulee boosters that the electrolytic manufacture of magnesium from near-by sources of limestone, dolomite, and magnesite, will provide the basis for a considerable expansion of Washington's inland empire, even though a commercial process for the manufacture of magnesium from these locally available materials has not yet been perfected. Assuming that such a process is worked out, the barrier of freight rates need not be prohibitive since magnesium is light and the market for its alloys is likely to increase greatly when the price

is lowered. On the other hand, according to Jonathan Norton Leonard in *Tools of Tomorrow,* "Magnesium chloride is a by-product from Michigan brine, which yields a long list of other valuable chemicals. If this chloride were not used for magnesium production, it would have to be thrown away." Furthermore, Mr. Leonard demonstrates clearly that the procreativeness of modern metallurgy and technology is such as to introduce an impossible number of unknown quantities into any economic equation based on present sources of and uses for almost any given raw material. Under capitalism, metal competes with metal and process with process, just as in the Northwest, region competes with region and city with city; just as in the larger arena of the national economy state competes with state and one group of vested interests with another. In this situation the New Deal's donations of cheap power become merely bones to fight over and the still small voice of "planning" is drowned in the clamor of competing suitors for Federal favors.

The terms of this competition are the classic terms of the American Dream: Get-Rich-Quick and Something-for-Nothing, modified, however, by the stresses of a declining total economy so that the objective becomes not so much expansion as a life and death struggle for survival in which the competing regions, no less than the private interests affected, employ every available instrument of publicity and pressure politics.

We even have the spectacle of competing planners: opposed schemes and programs for the reconciliation of the various regional, state, municipal and private vested interests affected. The proposal of J. D. Ross for the purchase

by Seattle City Light of the properties of the Puget Sound Light and Power Company and the re-sale of some of these properties to other municipalities is one such scheme: an important element of this proposal is the further development of power from the Skagit. Against it are ranged the proponents of a scheme by which the State of Washington is to purchase the total bloc of Grand Coulee Power and re-sell it to public and private distributing systems—public acquisition of these systems by condemnation being also proposed. The literature of these conflicting proposals is already so huge that it is impossible even to summarize it. An important aspect of this regional conflict would appear to lie in the alleged preferential advantage given to Portland over Seattle by the cheap power from the Bonneville project now under way, and the improvement of water transport on the Columbia up to the Dalles. It is apprehended by Seattle and hoped for by Portland that the wheat, fruit, and ore of Washington's Inland Empire will then go to market by water through Portland rather than by rail across the Cascades to Seattle.

If the planners of capitalism have as tough a nut as that to crack in just one corner of America it is rather sickening to imagine the headaches in Washington where the embattled Senators and Congressmen, each harried by fiercely antagonistic groups of his constituency, bring their mutually incompatible demands and programs to the luncheon table of a President who hasn't yet made up his mind about anything—not even whether the power resources of America are to be privately or publicly exploited.

In a magazine article I ventured to suggest that the trou-

ble with this picture is that capitalism can't plan and that the dog-fight of regional, profit-motivated pressure groups that passes for "planning" under the New Deal, merely amplifies and accelerates the confusion and decline of the system which Mr. Roosevelt was given a mandate to restore. I was instantly rewarded by being denounced, impartially and unqualifiedly, by all the various groups involved, including both the reformers and the reactionaries. However, the suggestion is here reiterated with all proper humility. Because of the rate of technological change, if for no other reason, planning would be difficult enough even given the centralized responsibility and power of a socialized system. But to jam the new scale, the new pace of the technological forces into the obsolete pattern of the unviable but still vivid American Dream is a task that must daunt the most stalwart and illusioned reformers.

Nevertheless, the attempt was made, and in fairness to the embattled defenders of Grand Coulee I should permit them to state their case. The following excerpts from a letter from James O'Sullivan, Secretary of the Columbia Basin Commission, will serve this purpose:

> The Grand Coulee Project is the result of many years of supreme sacrifice on the part of an earnest band of men and women. During these years the deadly enemy of the project has been the power trust. The project has also been opposed by Eastern interests who do not want to see the West developed. It has met opposition also from the Ross forces in Seattle and interests that want to see the lower river developed for navigation. . . .
>
> You may rest assured that neither the Columbia Basin Commission nor the Bureau of Reclamation is going to permit

speculators to take a profit on Columbia Basin lands. These lands will either be bought by the Federal government at a valuation of not to exceed $5.00 an acre on the average, or the price will be so controlled that the honest-to-God farmer and settler will get the land at a fair appraised value. It would be suicidal to permit speculation to take the settler's profits. The project would not be feasible. . . .

A representative of an Eastern insurance company recently called at this office to secure advice as to whether or not his company should sell to the AAA about 2,000 acres in the Columbia Basin territory. The AAA offered them about $5.00 an acre. I advised his company to accept the government offer, telling the representative that the government would not deliver water to this land unless the owner agreed to sell all acreage in access of a normal farm, say 80 acres, at an appraised value to be set by the government. . . .

You refer to speculators using folders and data published by the Commission and the Spokane Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of these folders is not to encourage speculation but to promote the project as a whole. The Spokane Chamber of Commerce is a deadly enemy of speculation on the project. . . .

You refer to the price charged by contractors for feeding and housing in connection with the Grand Coulee project. This price may be slightly high but no worker is required to secure his food and lodging from the contractor. I believe the main trouble is that the minimum for common labor is set too low, viz., at 50 cents an hour. I have always believed that common labor should receive at least $.60 an hour.

You refer again to the shack towns at the Grand Coulee dam site,—in order to prevent shack towns, it would have been necessary for the government to have purchased an area at least 50 miles square around the dam site. . . .

With all respect to Mr. O'Sullivan and other regional patriots who have doubtless worked without personal profit in behalf of Grand Coulee and similar projects, it strikes me that the above paragraphs merely document the general contention that planning is not feasible within the existing framework of law and ownership.

Paragraph 1 illustrates the several types of opposition that any major Federal project encounters: the opposition of vested private interests—the power trust—and competing regional interests both near at hand and far away. Incidentally, it should be observed that J. D. Ross, superintendent of Seattle Light and Power, has repeatedly denied any opposition to the Grand Coulee project as such. What he has objected to is the prospect that the Seattle, Tacoma, and Centralia municipal plants might have to "relinquish all that they have gained through years of struggle and amortization of millions of dollars of bonded indebtedness on their plants in order that a market can be found for Coulee power and in order that the Coulee and Bonneville investments will be shifted to the taxpayers of the state." His argument gains force because of the excellent record of Seattle City Light, which in competition with the Puget Sound Light and Power Company now furnishes at low rates 75 per cent of the current supplied to Seattle, and because of his success, after being denied PWA money to complete the Skagit development, in securing private capital for this purpose.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 ignore the reasonable ground for expecting both speculation and government deficits furnished by the record of Federal reclamation projects to date. According to an article "Spare that Desert!" in the

June 16, 1934, issue of *Collier's,* land speculation in connection with the El Paso project in South Texas forced land prices up from 50 cents an acre to $50 an acre so that speculators reaped practically all the benefits of the government expenditure, leaving the farmers to pay interest on inflated land values and fail to pay the government to which they still owe $13,000,000. On 28 reclamation projects, costing $140,787,000, about 11 per cent has thus far been repaid. While accurate recent surveys are not available, it is probable that over half the land in the Columbia Basin is owned not by farmers, but by insurance companies, real estate companies, banks, public utilities, railroads, and investment companies. Since many of them, like the insurance company cited by Mr. O'Sullivan, are carrying on their books the débris of the American Dream in the form of defunct wheat booms and apple booms, they are not likely to take the government's $5.00 an acre for their land if they can help themselves, and they are far from helpless in the courts and elsewhere.

Concerning the folder published by the Spokane Chamber of Commerce, referred to in paragraph 4, I consider myself an expert in the matter of boost literature, and this was a typical specimen. Speculators, both "honest" and crooked, flourish in the lee of such promotion, and Grand Coulee is no exception as will later appear.

When the President visited Grand Coulee in August, 1934, the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* published a special Grand Coulee edition which was written from beginning to end in the language of the American Dream. This dream has nothing, and can have nothing, in common with any genuine enterprise of functional planning. Among the

advertisers in this special issue was the shack town of Grand Coulee which the Columbia Basin Commission doesn't like, but whose birth along with the other boom towns would have been aborted if the project had been really planned. They were inevitable at Grand Coulee, just as they were inevitable at Fort Peck for the simple reason that the government failed to house and feed the workers decently at prices which they could afford; also because the power of government is limited, particularly the power of condemnation. Although all calculations of economic feasibility were based on the completion of the total project, including the high dam and the irrigation reservoir and canals which would absorb a considerable percentage of the power yield, only the low dam was at first authorized; later this was changed so that the construction now in progress is the first stage of the high dam. But until the irrigation project is not merely projected but authorized, government condemnation of the Columbia Basin lands cannot proceed. Meanwhile, in anticipation of future government-subsidized prosperity, a lively trade in the real estate affected was going on; the very floor of the Grand Coulee itself was being bought and sold even though it must later be covered with water. And on the bluff above the dam site I saw the American Dream itself sprouting out of the sagebrush—Grand Coulee, a boom town built in less than a year out of faith, hope, barn siding and paperboard, crass and raw and startling against an austere backdrop of leaning cliffs and sudden chasms.

Grand Coulee boasted a population of about 1,500 people. It had twenty eating places, as many saloons, at least

a half dozen wide open brothels, five grocery stores, two jewelry stores, a furniture store, two drug stores, two ladies' wear shoppes, three beauty shoppes, a proportionate quota of painless dentists, radio repair shops, and six real estate agents.

The town was a foot deep in mud, and the ladies from the sporting houses went in up to their ankles getting to the beauty shoppes. But the 2,500 womanless males working on the dam provided good business, hence they were cheerful and philosophic—the New Pioneers. Also they were closely supervised by a hard-boiled ex-army doctor, who was much more interested in hygiene than in morals —he had much more trouble with transient hashers than with the professionals in the houses.

The realtors were also pretty cheerful. House lots and business sites in Grand Coulee were being sold and re-sold at a lively rate. One realtor told me that in a few weeks' time a corner lot, 120 feet deep, changed hands six times and the final owner had refused $2,250. This for a microscopic piece of desert gumbo which had sold at around a dollar an acre three years before and which, there being no logical reason to prevent it, will probably be reclaimed by the sagebrush, the rattlesnakes, and the jackrabbits a few years from now when the dam is completed.

The realtors supplied me with specimens of their literature. It was standard boom stuff as the following excerpts will indicate:

"Buy at the Fringe and WAIT"—so said John Jacob Astor, more than one hundred years ago.

"All wealth comes from the soil"—Henry Ford.

As surely as the sun shines this great Columbia Basin project will be completed and become one of the garden spots of the world.

When the first unit is authorized values will soar and the land within it now offered for as little as five dollars an acre may be sold for $100–$200–$300 or even as much as $500 an acre.

A few dollars invested now and small monthly payments will, we believe, provide a comfortable self-supporting home for your old age, or provide cash at some future time when you need it. We believe before you have even finished your payments, the project may have been started.

Banks may break, stocks become worthless, jobs be impossible to secure—but a few acres in the Columbia Basin purchased now will always be a home—and when the great dam is finished a comfortable living for you and yours.

The center spread of this beguiling document, copies of which anyone interested may obtain from Columbia Basin Land Owners, 204 Seattle Theatre Bldg., Seattle, Wash., reproduces an enlarged version of the war department's map of the project and underneath are captions further titillating the fancy of credulous investors and home-seekers:

1,200,000 acres—30,000 farms capable of providing a living for 100,000 people and producing food and necessities of life for a million more—room for cities and power for hundreds of factories—a magnificent dream ready for fulfillment.

A dream is right. The century-old American Dream of Get-Rich-Quick and Something-for-Nothing. It was valid in the days of John Jacob Astor—the shrewder land speculators of that and later periods laid the foundations of

many of the older American fortunes. That dream is not valid today. It is a fake and a fraud, and so long as the Federal and state authorities permit unscrupulous promoters to capitalize on it, their pretensions of control and "planning" are subject to the same charge. This must be said at the same time that the difficulties of control, given the present structure of law and ownership, are fully acknowledged. These difficulties are increased by the fact that the Columbia Basin is strewn with the wreckage of past land booms in which the Dream was exploited with scarcely any pretense whatever of either intelligence or scruple. A part of this wreckage can, of course, be attributed to the fact that for the past twenty years the rainfall in the Columbia Basin has declined year after year. Another part is attributable to the progressive squeezing of all agricultural producers by the evolving forces of monopoly capitalism. But much of it was unquestionably due to the alternating cycles of speculative inflation and deflation to which land values in the Columbia Basin have been subjected.

During the first decade of the twentieth century much of the better land in the Columbia Basin was occupied by relatively prosperous wheat farmers and land prices were high. One of the Grand Coulee realtors told me that in 1911 he had sold his homestead in the Basin at $50.00 an acre. Recently he had bought it back at $1.25 an acre. What happened, as he described it, was that as rainfall declined and the prices of agricultural products fell, the homesteader went broke and the bank or mortgage company foreclosed. The mortgage company tried to sell the land, often failed to do so and consequently it too went broke. The county then took over the land which had

become tax delinquent, and resold it, either to the original owners or to a land development company.

Near Quincy I stopped at a filling station and the old-timer who ran it was able to document this cycle out of his personal experience. Quincy flats, he assured me, had once been an agricultural paradise and would be again when the long struggle for irrigation was consummated. It was so fertile, so mild in climate, that he, a Scotch seaman, had fallen in love with the country thirty years before and for a time had been a prosperous wheat and cattle rancher. Then the rainfall had begun to decline; ultimately he had been defeated by the combined forces of nature, ever more niggardly with rain, and the erosion of mortgage interest based on inflated land values.

In the twenties the wind began to blow the soil away from the roots of the bunch grass. It was pitiful to see, he said, and pitiful to hear the starved lowing of the cattle. Once they had come down from the high country by themselves in great herds, for the winter pasture. I could see for myself how little pasture there was now.

What I saw, looking east from Quincy, was the flat, dry bed of the huge inland sea which the Columbia Basin had once been. Once the gold of ripe wheat had flowed over that desert like a tide. But the wheat farmers had departed, their buildings had crumbled back into the sagebrush and the blown soil had covered them. Now there was scarcely a house or barn roof to interrupt the level plane of the landscape.

Underneath this landscape lies another dream—oil and natural gas. South of the Basin, in the Rattlesnake Hills

district, there is already considerable production of natural gas, and the Peoples Gas and Oil Company is drilling a well in Frenchman Hills which is within the area of prospective irrigation. I was informed that this company had 130,000 acres of land under lease for oil rights only, and that these leases were being sold for $19.50 per acre for the lease only. The language of the promotion literature is again the language of the American Dream: "Give your dollars a chance to bring you in a big profit!" "One successful speculation—a lifetime of work."

It appeared that these leases were secured by the same roving buyers, active ever since the authorization of the project was imminent, who have been picking up abandoned or tax delinquent acreage. The rumors that ex-Senator Dill, who was powerfully influential in securing the authorization of the Grand Coulee project, was personally interested in Columbia Basin Land have been vigorously denied by Mr. Dill and this denial must be accepted, since there is no evidence of his personal interest in such speculative activity. There was, however, evidence that a number of the Senator's former political associates were interested in the acquisition before condemnation of Grand Coulee lands.

The Columbia Basin Commission does not deny the existence of speculation in Columbia Basin lands but minimizes its importance. But, Mr. O'Sullivan protests, "there is not a single owner of any land in the Columbia Basin who is not going to lose money through his investment. Both the private owners and the mortgage companies have invested far more than they will ever get out of the project. . . . The only advantage a speculator has

now is to sell his acreage at a price in excess of its actual value to an innocent investor who is bound to lose."

Exactly. The fleecing of suckers in land booms is a perennial racket, and each new boom is pyramided on the bones of the victims of past booms. That, in the present instance, some of the past victims are real estate and mortgage companies is a circumstance calculated to wring tears from investors, but scarcely from farmers. If the Columbia Basin Commission and the Federal authorities together manage to keep the Grand Coulee and Columbia Basin projects even relatively clean of speculation they will have established an All-American record for projects of this size. They may succeed. If they fail—and the cards of law and custom are badly stacked against them—what will happen is that a new frontier will be created, an artificially made, publicly financed block of exploitable resources enabling the Dream to be dreamed all over again.

In any case Grand Coulee, like other New Deal projects motivated primarily by the necessity to make work, cannot accurately be described as planning. It is regional promotion and development, which would be admirable as one unit of the Gos-plan of a continental coöperative commonwealth. It is not that. The ghosts won't let it be that.

What America will get out of the Grand Coulee project is a big bloc of cheap power and a big bloc of irrigated acreage—excellent things in and of themselves, which will be heartily welcomed and used by the genuine planners of the future. Meanwhile they are likely merely to amplify and accelerate the quite helpless chaos of capitalist planlessness.

23

SIGNS AND PORTENTS

THE chief business of the world at the moment is that of avoiding another Great War. That business was very much on my mind, because I had not believed in the last war, and had not enjoyed my part in it. All across the continent I had encountered certain signs and portents that left me feeling decidedly uncomfortable. Possibly I was over-sensitized, but I couldn't even look at a power-dam—admirable in itself—without speculating about its use in the perspective of an imperialist war. . . .

The army was spending $32,000,000 to dam the Columbia forty miles up river from Portland at Bonneville. When the dam is completed there will be 430,000 kilowatts for the private and public power distributors to fight over, the probability being that Portland will purchase the private company and achieve a highly desirable intertie with the publicly owned plants of Tacoma and Seattle. Meanwhile, the salmon-fishing interests were objecting mildly to the destruction of the salmon industry of the Columbia, threatened by both Bonneville and Grand Coulee, as evidenced by the following excerpt from an editorial in the December 15, 1934, issue of the *Astorian Budget:*

The proposal of the regional planning conference . . . to run the Grand Coulee project into one of reclamation and irriga-

tion, rather than a low dam power project, indicates another threat to the much attacked salmon industry. If the fish do manage to pass above Bonneville on their way to the spawning grounds, Grand Coulee will surely shut them off from the high reaches of the river, particularly if the high dam is constructed, for the difficulty and expense of building adequate fishways in connection with such a structure is almost insurmountable. . . . In fact, with the power sources not needed and land development apparently unwise, there is apparently no reason at all for Grand Coulee except to give someone a job.

The answer of the Columbia Basin Commission to this is that few fish get above the private dam at Rock Island anyway, and those that do can be dipped out and put in other streams. The Commission also contended with reason (in the end this contention was acceded to) that the low dam didn't make sense, since there would be no pumping requirement to use the power and no irrigated agricultural settlements to share the cost of the project as a whole.

As far as I could make out, the army had organized the Bonneville project better than either the Fort Peck or Grand Coulee projects (the latter administered by the Reclamation Bureau). Board and lodging at Bonneville cost workers only a dollar a day, and partly for this reason —the chief reason being the proximity to Portland—there was comparatively little speculative building near the dam site.

Both while in Portland and later I found myself pondering the lavishness with which PWA money had been

awarded to the Grand Coulee and Bonneville projects. A war mobilization of men and materials would find plenty of use for all that power; indeed, it would put the whole productive apparatus of the west coast into high gear. There was also the thoroughness with which the A. F. of L. hierarchy sabotaged the strike of the northwest lumber workers last summer. The A. F. of L. bureaucracy was patriotic in the last war, and would almost certainly be patriotic in the next. If, as seemed probable, the west coast would be the war base, then the A. F. of L. bureaucracy could be trusted to assist the fascisticization of west coast labor. Something of the sort had happened in the last war when the Loyal Lumber Legion was a factor in breaking the power of the I.W.W.

Seattle and Portland point north to Alaska and west to the trade with the Orient. In the event of war with Japan —and the drift is increasingly toward such a catastrophic consummation—Seattle and Portland will be major bases for military and naval operations, with the Aleutians, probably, a hopping off point for air raids on Tokio.

It is in this perspective, it seems to me, that the kaleidoscopic unfolding of events on the whole west coast should be thought about, and I found informed workers who agreed with this view. They too had seen the threat written in the sky when the navy planes flew to Wake Island; had pondered the meaning of the haste with which the Matanuska Valley settlement in Alaska was rushed through. Did the War Department want an independent food supply base in Alaska in case the line of communication to Seattle should be broken?

Other developments are perhaps properly to be exam-

ined in this perspective: the insistence of the State Department and the President that the latter be given a free hand in the control of munitions or other exports to belligerents; that he must be permitted to define which nation is the "aggressor" and so "keep us out of war" by committing us inevitably to the support of the power with which trade is permitted. It seems strange, in the light of the President's record, that anyone should believe that we can have any real protection against being drawn into war so long as the war-making power remains in his hands. Not that the President really *wants* war—Woodrow Wilson didn't want war. But it would seem that Mr. Roosevelt, even more than Mr. Wilson, cannot be trusted to resist the war drift.

Nobody I talked to in the northwest wanted war. The business men, both liberals and conservatives, didn't want war. But for that matter, the average American business man didn't want the last war. He helped to elect a president pledged to keep us out of war. This time business will have better reasons than ever for not wanting war; both in the northwest and elsewhere the shrewder and more informed business men were aware that another war would probably precipitate the ending of the present social order. But these same business men, when it was put to them, saw the same drift that I saw.

Labor doesn't want war. The unemployed don't want war. Yet both unemployed and employed workers felt, rather than saw, this drift. At the very bottom—the half-hungry hitch-hikers I picked up on the road, the casual acquaintances I picked up in slum cafés and coffee pots—this feeling was most ominous. The last war was remem-

bered, not for its toll of slaughtered and broken lives, but for its spurt of employment, of war-prosperity. "I guess things won't get much better until we have another war," they said. Did they want to be killed or maimed in another war, I asked? No, but they would have to go.

They didn't say, simply, that they were half starved, and if they were in the army and navy they would at least be fed. But that, I was convinced, was what was in the back of their minds. Mussolini, I reflected, after failing to rehabilitate the Italian economy by public works and the Fascist version of rural resettlement, had in desperation beaten the drums for the conquest of Ethiopia and in his mobilization of volunteers had given preference to the unemployed. . . . Well, that is one way to dispose of a problem which continues to baffle the New Deal. Then, indeed, it will be: "Unemployed, Back to the Land"—to quote the bitter phrase which the anti-fascist Italian novelist Ignazio Silone proposed as a suitable inscription to carve on the tombstones of the next crop of war dead.

It seems probable that except for the professional itch of the army and navy brass hats, and of professional patrioteers like Hearst, nobody really wants war, not even the investment bankers. But that doesn't mean that we won't have war. As to what war it will be, the War Department in exercising its responsibility for the "defense" of the country is preparing for war—a particular war. In August, 1914, when the various war plans of Germany, France, Russia, and England came out of cold storage, they didn't have to be revised very much. The war that the brass hats prepare for is almost certain to be the war that we shall get.

CALIFORNIA, WHERE LIFE IS BETTER

24

WHERE LIFE IS BETTER

THE mail in Portland contained an invitation to a New Year's party in San Francisco. If I hurried, I could arrive in time, and I resolved to hurry. So the last days of December found me coasting down the long southern slope of the Siskiyous into the upper valley of the Sacramento. For many hours I drove through rain, fog, the drenched darkness of steep-walled, pine-wooded canyons. Then, as I topped one of the lower foothills, the sun broke through and poured gold into that whole magnificent trough of the Great Valley, from the blue barrier of the Coast Range on the west to the snow-covered peaks of the Sierras on the east. California again.

"California, Where Life is Better."

Twelve years before I had written a booklet with that title for Californians, Inc. I was an advertising copy writer then, and this was a hack job that oddly became to a degree a labor of love before I got through with it. I had come to California the year after the Armistice, still suffering from the exasperating nervous depletion which the physicians vaguely diagnosed as "shell-shock."

San Francisco had received me hospitably, even generously, and I was grateful. I fell in love with the climate, with the landscape, and to a degree with the people and their way of life. Besides working part time for advertising

agencies I wrote poetry and participated in the indigenous theatrical and other cultural enterprises. Here the Californians seemed to me to be lazy and sentimental. I jeered at them ruthlessly and somewhat pharisaically—I wonder now that they bore with me as tolerantly as they did. But I wrote that booklet and then, after three years, I went East, with the promise of reëmployment if I chose to return.

In New York, I ran into John Cowper Powys, whose Oxford-gowned platform histrionism I had had frequent occasions to admire during his annual barn-storming tours of the Pacific Coast.

"What! You are going back?" exclaimed Powys, his craggy, Silurian countenance suddenly becoming a mask of horror. "Ah, Rorty, don't go back to that terrible country! I speak as a prophet, Rorty. Don't go back!"

But with the words of that strange, unique man of genius ringing in my ears, I did go back. I had, even then, a suspicion that Powys was right. But California had done much to restore my health. I loved the country with the same sort of obstinate, defeated passion that the late Mary Austin reveals in her "Lands of the Sun." And I liked the people—not just my friends, but the population of the San Francisco Bay region at large. I had found them to be decent, kindly, generous people. It was their state, and it was beautiful past describing. Why did it have to be terrible? Powys was a charlatan, I told myself—he has indeed mocked himself with that charge—and I could well forget his Sibylline howl. So I went back to California with my advertising banjo on my knee, and stayed another year. . . .

Now, after ten years, I was back again. It was mid-winter, yet I lay on the ground in the orange orchard of a friendly rancher, ate the ripe fruit, and fell once more under the spell of the warm sunlight, the complex, beguiling fragrances, the wide sweep and lift of beauty all around me.

"California, Where Life is Better"—I still possessed a copy of that ancient opus and decided to have a look at it. . . . I should have known better. There was a job for you! To be sure, I had rigorously insisted that the facts in the booklet be true facts, and both the agency and the client had supported me. They were true facts—as far as they went. Even the enthusiasm still sounded genuine. But both the facts and the enthusiasm were beside the point. I had not wanted to perpetrate a fake. Yet I had faked it just the same. Certainly, what needed to be said about California in 1922 was not what I had written in that booklet. Indeed, I reflected that if I and others—enough of them—had said and done those necessary, intransigent things in 1922, perhaps I would not have now found myself entering a valley still reeking with the stench of violence, the misery of starved and terrorized workers; would not be headed for a city still shaken by a general strike and its red-hunting sequel.

No, I had not written the truth about California in that booklet. Instead I had quoted the archaic genteel optimism of Bayard Taylor:

> Driving along through these enchanting scenes I had a grander dream. I saw a more beautiful race in possession of this Paradise—a race in which the best symmetry and grace

of the Greek are partially restored; milder manners, better regulated impulses, and a keen appreciation of the arts which enrich and embellish life.

After which, in the introduction, I had myself been guilty of the following:

. . . California cannot fulfil her manifest potentialities until many new millions have been added to her present population. The hard-sledding pioneer phase is past. There remains the task of building, in this garden of the West, a proud and rich civilization which will be in some measure an answer to the opulent challenge of nature. Life today in California is on the whole freer, richer, happier in all probability than it is anywhere else in the world. What life can be tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, if man does well his part where nature has been infinitely prodigal, is something that can scarcely be contemplated without a catch of the breath.

Dream stuff. Californians have always been good at covering the ugliness of the present fact with a saccharine frosting of neo-Hellenic day-dreaming. It is the sentimentality of the pioneer; the other face of that sentimentality being a childish, hysterical brutality. "If man does well his part"—I should have expanded that "if" and written what was true then and is still true: that not even the ground-work of a civilization has been laid on the Pacific Coast of America; that the dream of the pioneers was a childish, greedy fake, doomed from the beginning to dissolve in panic-stricken chaos. . . .

Sutter had known this, when they found gold in his mill race at Sacramento, and promptly proceeded to

drive him out of the primitive pastoral paradise he had begun to create. Powys, I reflected, had known it too. That was what he had meant when he thundered his Cassandra-like prophecies and urged me not to go back.

I had been a Californiac, even though I didn't know it. What is a Californiac? Is it something evil, as Powys had seemed to imply? No, it is not exactly evil. It is something stupid and ignorant, and cruel, subject to sudden panics and rages. The vigilantes of the fifties were Californiacs. They had suppressed the "bad men" and made San Francisco safe for the succession of financial and political high-binders who had looted it assiduously and for the most part legally right up to the earthquake and afterward. And now I was soon to encounter the Californiacs of 1935 —the San Francisco Industrial Association and the Associated Farmers who were busy saving California again, and for similar purposes.

Well, I was no longer a Californiac. The intervening decade had done something to me and for me. This time I would write a straight story to the best of my ability and leave it as a human testimony for those unsubdued Coast Range hills, so arid and hard under their soft contours, to mock at.

At Williams I found some pretext to get rid of my hitch-hiker of the moment. He was a backwoods Michigan boy who had chauffeured a middle-aged couple across the continent, and now tormented me with his frantic longing to get to Los Angeles in time to see the Southern California-Notre Dame football game. I liked him well enough and sympathized mildly with his heart's desire.

But I wanted to be alone with that well-remembered landscape—wanted to see whether it could still do to me what it had done before.

It did. I suppose there is no more insidiously beautiful landscape in the world than the Great Valley, and even more, the valleys in the folds of the Coast Range between the Sacramento and the sea. It was these I remembered and sought again, leaving the main highway and plunging into the pass that would take me, first to Clear Lake, and then down the western slope of Mt. Helena into the warm, wine-scented luxuriance of the Napa Valley.

Quickly the pink-hued prune and apricot orchards were succeeded by the green live-oaks. The road climbed, twisted, descended. The scrawl of hills and valleys was so intricate that at times I lost all sense of direction. Under the live-oaks sheep were grazing, the young lambs drifting after their mothers like little ragged pieces of detached fluff. Whole valleys seemed almost entirely unoccupied, tranquil and soundless, except for the cropping sheep and the seep of spring water out of the banks. Here, surely, beauty and peace were to be had by the square mile, if—But I put that "if" out of my mind. The country, I told myself again, was young, beautiful, and not terrible.

At the peak I caught a glimpse of the Pacific, breaking at the foot of the westernmost range. Then I began coasting down the long spiral into the Napa Valley, with the vineyards climbing up the foothills to meet me; the fragrance, too, of a hundred wineries. Reverently, I entered into one of those cool, moist-walled cloisters and bought a gallon of excellent claret for a quarter of what it would have cost me in New York.

But, as usual, I had to hurry. Skirting the base of Mt. Tamalpais, I saw again the green, fog-nourished hills of Marin County, with the bay on one side and the sea on the other—a whole world of beauty in itself. Sausalito was almost unchanged—only the piers of the new bridge rising as a threat to the quiet of the redwood canyons and the unspoiled beaches stretching for miles up the coast. . . .

San Francisco again. On an earlier New Year's Eve I had written:

The prisoners of starvation came out—
My people, Oh my beautiful people came out, twirling rattles and blowing horns at the moon!

They came out that evening, many whom I remembered and some new ones: the artists, the writers, the intellectuals, the "more beautiful race" Bayard Taylor was chastely mooning about when he wrote that blurb for my boost pamphlet. As a matter of fact many of them were beautiful, in body and in spirit. . . . It was all very gay, mildly drunken, and a little sad. Sad, because none of these people could re-capture the freedom, the grace, the old bohemian carelessness that had so charmed me ten years before.

That grace, which was never wholly authentic, was fading even then. It was gone now—the general strike and its red-hunting sequel had slain it. I heard tales of the persecution and espionage that some of my friends had suffered. I heard other tales, even less pretty, of "liberal" educators who, reading the storm warnings, had prudently

snuffed out their little candles well in advance of the gale of terror that Hearst, Johnson, and Company had unleashed on the Bay Cities. Well-to-do liberals, torn by sympathy for the cotton pickers of the San Joaquin or the "stoop labor" of the Salinas Valley, had been talked to firmly by their bankers. Some of them had talked back staunchly. . . . Their circle of friends had narrowed.

The lines were being drawn more and more sharply now. San Francisco labor was fighting for its life. San Francisco bankers and industrialists felt that they were fighting for their lives. The day of the liberals, the "mediators" of the culture, was past. The drive of a brutal, acquisitive barbarism cannot be "mediated" any more than a plague of locusts can be mediated. It can be destroyed, perhaps, to make room for something better though only after it has almost destroyed itself; and that time was not yet.

With respect to the main business of life, which was the grabbing and exploitation of mineral and oil resources, of water and its yield of power and irrigation, of fruit land and rice land and delta land for truck growing, of transportation franchises and other opportunities for legal banditry, of successive waves of imported peon labor—with respect to California's primary acquisitive drive, the rôle of the intellectuals, the "beautiful people," was, had always been, irrelevant, adventitious and meagerly parasitic.

That was the reason they had been very imperfectly beautiful and almost nothing they said or did had seeded itself in the human and natural landscape. Now in age many of them were sad; their hopes and dreams had turned to bitterness and cynicism.

Fremont Older, a great newspaperman and in his day a great reformer, was a beautiful person. But I remembered him only in defeat. I remembered the emphatic bang of his bald head on the wall back of his desk as he told me all the things that couldn't be done, all the massive reasons there were for consigning the human race to a richly deserved perdition. Hearst had drawn the teeth of one of California's boldest, bravest lions; I was told he spent his declining years in sympathetic converse with the Lord of San Simeon, whose cynical liberality ensured his comfort.

George Sterling was at times almost a great poet and always a beautiful person. The tycoons of the Bohemian Club had drawn his teeth too, and patronized his productivity to death, although they had never been able to destroy the instinctive artist's fidelity to his art, or his invincible dignity and generosity of spirit. But I knew that he had been glad to die.

The spinsterish Bayard Taylor would have been shocked at the new archetypes of human beauty who were coming forward to succeed the "beautiful people" of San Francisco's bohemian past. Bridges, for example, the militant rank-and-file leader of the longshoremen. Physically, that close-mouthed "hard rock from down under" exhibited something of the "symmetry and grace of the Greek." But his manners, though he was courteous enough, were scarcely mild.

The seventeen communists then awaiting trial at Sacramento for "criminal syndicalism" were even better examples of the new people. Both at first and second hand I saw and learned enough about them to feel that their

version of human beauty was superior to almost anything California had produced in the past. For the most part, they represented the radicalized student cadres of the Communist Party. They were young, energetic, idealistic, and they had needed all these qualities to accomplish the formidable task of organizing the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union. It had been, indeed, an epic struggle, successfully waged in strike after strike, until the whole force of the food-producing corporations and their banker allies was mobilized to smash the union and jail the leaders. Before I left California I found myself twice drawn into the sequel of that struggle.

What of the inheritors of San Francisco's liberal tradition? How had they adapted themselves to the sharpened terms of conflict, in this *Götterdämmerung* of San Francisco's frail and aborted pseudo-Hellenism?

It seemed to me that they divided roughly into two categories: the liberals in business and the liberals in the arts and in the professions. Most of the former, during the general uproar of the strike, had been drawn into the fight on the side of the employers—kicking, squalling, futilely "mediating," but nevertheless serving faithfully after their fashion. To do them justice, some of them had certainly done their best to temper and abbreviate the red-hunting sequel of the general strike. But theirs was not a felicitous rôle, nor were they happy in it.

I talked to a member of the Chamber of Commerce who described himself as an "evolutionary socialist." Everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds, he assured me. I was wrong in thinking that San Francisco was ruled by an organized plutocracy of finance

and industry. The picture was rather that of a congeries of antipathetic groups, loosely united under the banner of the Industrial Association during the general strike, but already flying apart again for reasons of both profit and opinion. He was more or less right, although the trend was toward a closer integration of the forces of business along fascist lines.

A newspaperman who had gone the way of all journalistic flesh—into publicity—was grimmer and less optimistic. The situation was complicated, he explained, by the fact that the majority of the business leaders hadn't the slightest idea of what it was all about. They knew that strikes were bad for business, and they felt that labor should be "kept in its place." But they stalled like model T Fords when faced with the multi-engined complexities of the current economic and social situation.

The people who ran things, he explained, were the natural dominators who would run any setup, capitalist, fascist, or communist, but these dominators rarely understood anything, not even their own instinctive technique of domination. Another type was the natural acquisitor—it is a gift, he assured me, like the ability to play the fiddle—who would tend to acquire place and privilege in any setup. The acquisitor was likely to understand a little more, especially if he was a Jew—the Jews were natural analysts. But none of them understood enough. There were perhaps half a dozen business men in the whole city who had mastered the elementary facts of the capitalist economy and culture which were accepted as the commonplaces of our discussion; which any moderately competent village socialist can recite by the yard.

If this seems incredible, one must remind himself that the odds were all against business men really learning anything—let alone doing anything about it when they did learn something. The pressures and tensions of the crisis all tended to narrow the focus of the business man's vision to the ledgers of his own business. The more he needed to know about everything the less time he had to study and reflect. Hence the current premium on "intellectuals" in business: the more recent university graduates, also ex-professors and ex-journalists hired to think for business.

What sort of thinking would that be? The dominators and the acquisitors between them would see to it that it was fascist thinking as soon as the wet and shrinking shoe of the capitalist decline pinched hard enough. In fact, it was already evident that a good deal of precisely that sort of thinking was being done, and its conclusions embodied in action. The Associated Farmers, Inc., had been assigned the job in the valleys, where already stockades were being erected for the incarceration of workers in the inevitable strikes to come, and correspondence courses in the technique of vigilantism were being conducted. In San Francisco, the Industrial Association was bound to stage a comeback. They had yielded too much for their comfort in the settlement of the longshoremen's strike, and the competition of open-shop Los Angeles was a growing challenge and threat.

So much for the intellectuals in business. As for the "beautiful people" in the arts and in the professions, they again divided into two categories: the old-line liberals and the new crop of depression converts, most of whom had

gone communist with a bang. At the New Year's party I cornered one of the ablest and most informed of the former class. He said, in gloomy summation: "This is a sonofabitch period. The fascists are sonsabitches and the communists are sonsabitches, and they'll have to fight it out on their own level. It's no time for decent people, liberal people who fuss about truth, tolerance, such things as that. We're on the spot now and I guess we'll always be on the spot."

I found that this expressed, with some qualifications, the mood of many of the Bay City liberals I encountered.

As for the new crop of depression-converted intellectual radicals, pure scientists or pure artists yesterday and pure communists today, they repudiated this liberal defeatism with flaming conviction. Although not members of the Party, they hewed to the Party line more strictly than Earl Browder himself. This was natural, since Mr. Browder is subject to the Higher Learning of the Comintern, with its disconcerting shifts of permanent infallibility. Most of them had little Marx and less Lenin. Some of them had mastered a good deal of both, but had little knowledge of, or experience with, the radical labor movement, and practically no understanding of the factional conflicts of revolutionary politics. Yet all of them swallowed the new gospel with an uncritical unction equal to that with which the eminent physicist, Robert Millikan, swallows the Episcopalian God.

The day after I reached San Francisco, I became involved, as a member of the Non-Partisan Labor Defense, in an effort to build a united front defense of the Sacramento prisoners. The Sacramento criminal syndicalism

trial arose out of industrial struggles of which the now-extinct Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union was the storm-center. The 1934 Leonard-French-Lubin report to the National Labor Board has revealed that many of the three to four hundred thousand migratory farm workers of the Sacramento, San Joaquin and Imperial valleys live under conditions which "words cannot describe." The Federal investigators established that "many workers are not able to earn sufficient to maintain even a primitive, or savage standard of living."

When, in 1933, the union by a series of strikes in which many pickets were wounded and killed, forced general wage raises for field and shed labor, there began with the connivance and aid of public officers a concerted drive to wipe out unionism. In the drive, the *New York Times* has reported, "local authorities in the cotton counties took sides with the ranchers."

Anti-labor injunctions flowed thick and fast. When it seemed probable that a Federal judge was about to enjoin police attacks on strike meetings, the *San Diego Sun* blazoned the declaration of a "peace officer" that "there will be bloodshed" in such an event.

On April 24, 1934, the District Attorney of Sacramento County hired private detectives to "investigate" union leaders and "reds." Under cover of the anti-"red" hysteria during the San Francisco general strike, police raided union offices late in July, seized files, and jailed for "vagrancy" workers arrested in committee meeting and in their own residences. The arrested included Pat Chambers, the union's state organizer; Caroline Decker, its secretary; active unionists such as Jack Warnick and Norman Mini,

and fourteen others. Shortly after the Grand Jury returned indictments for criminal syndicalism.

All efforts to build a united front defense of the prisoners failed, with plenty of headaches for everybody concerned. The reasons for this failure are sufficiently explained in Herbert Solow's pamphlet, "Union Smashing in Sacramento," published by the National Sacramento Appeal Committee. Later eight of the defendants were convicted and sentenced to long terms.

I took my own headache on a hiking expedition over the Marin hills. My companion was a young student, the daughter of well-to-do parents. She was not a communist. In fact she was utterly indifferent to any aspect of the social struggle. She was exceptionally gifted and intelligent, I thought. But these gifts and all her energy were concentrated upon a single objective: that of preparing herself for her chosen profession. I tried to discuss with her the social content, the social obligations and the present social stultification of that profession. She wasn't interested. The burden of learning even one specialized field was infinitely difficult and exacting. She could think of nothing else.

That, I reflected, was one reason why there weren't more radical young students. She felt that her first duty was to master her subject and then to establish her economic independence. The university, she realized, was scarcely a part of the real world. For her it might be a means to participation in the real world. She had to become a part of that real world, whatever it was, however abjectly con-

fused and ugly, before she could begin to think about rejecting it.

Many thousands of students, graduated during the depression, had not become a part of that real world, might never become a part of it. Idle, dependent, with little hope of real jobs or real marriage, revolted by the make-believe of CWA, FERA, and WPA "made jobs" which gave them little chance to use their training, what would they do, to what savior would they turn? I talked to a good many of them on my trip, but they didn't know and I don't know. As far as I can make out, nobody knows. All we know is that they went fascist in Italy and Germany. And if they behave otherwise in America it will be little short of a miracle.

I stayed only a few days more in the Bay Region, but long enough for my by this time admittedly morbid apprehension of war to get another fillip. When the trans-bay bridge to Oakland was completed, there would be an exposition to celebrate the event. Plans were already being made. One group of business men wanted to place the exposition in the South Basin, a comparatively undeveloped outlying area, excellent as to climate, where the exposition structures could be preserved for permanent use. Another wanted it to be placed on tiny fog-swept Yerba Buena island. Why? Because then, after the exposition was over, the necessary grading would have been done for an airport, a military airport. And the decision in favor of Yerba Buena was practically assured. It would be another Pacific Coast war base, I reflected. Also a strategic base for military operations in case, some time in the far future,

another general strike should attain insurrectionary dimensions.

Hollywood was calling me, Hollywood, the Holy City, the Mecca of all good American dreamers. My head was full of big ideas for the picturization of what I had seen and thought. Surely there must be some way of cracking that oyster. . . . But I was no Beauty Queen, as I was shortly to learn.

25

DREAM FACTORY

THE little boy, having tossed his paper bag filled with water into the air for the pleasure of observing its descent upon the head of his playmate, remarks sagely, "What goes up, must come down." Similarly Hollywood, observing the rise and fall of stars, directors and writers, the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of Hollywood life in general, is propelled into the higher realms of philosophy. Just as M. Jourdain marveled at his achievement of prose, so Hollywood is dazzled by the perception that it has been acting dialectically all its life; effortlessly, unconsciously. Stupendous. Colossal. It's a law. It's a system!

The visitor encounters these Hollywood philosophers in the most unexpected places. For example, it was one of the most eminent defenders of Hollywood's New Purity who declared to the writer: "If we don't give 'em sh-t, (thesis), we lose our shirts" (antithesis). The synthesis, of course, is that we do give it to them, but with a moral ending and perfumes by Max Factor. Then (thesis), the women's clubs, the Catholic Bishops, and the state censorship boards, having a vested interest and opportunity in the matter, start caterwauling. Antithesis: we give them "Little Women," "The Little Minister," and little "David Copperfield." Synthesis: the state censorship boards are pretty sore, because the purer the movies, the worse their

business; also there are signs that the fans are becoming fed up with purity. So we continue in the safe terrain of the classics, but look for the hotter classics. Little "David Copperfield" was not so hot.

There are other, and even more interesting ways in which this dialectical process works out. The men and women, many of them finely gifted, who are employed in the manufacture of this tripe, become fed up with the business. To paraphrase a Hollywood wit, they work terribly hard, they lose their hair, their teeth and their virtue, and what do they get out of it? Nothing but a lousy fortune.

Hollywood is organized and capitalized evasion of reality and of the problem of art, which is to deal with reality and to tell the truth, however abstractly or symbolically. It is a vast, departmentalized, delicately coördinated dream factory. The industry is more necessary, hence more stable than steel, or housing, or power. True, in the contraction of the economy since 1929, the movie industry also suffered, but less, proportionately, than almost any other major industry except food products. Indeed, the suffering and bewilderment of the depression have augmented the demand for dreams, insofar as it became less and less possible for the average person to master or adjust himself to the intolerable realities of disemployment and destitution. The stream of dimes and quarters contracted, but the industry rationalized itself to deal with the new condition. The exhibitors gave two dreams for a quarter instead of one. Independent producers stepped into the breach and provided cheaply produced "featurettes" to supplement the big feature pictures. The "quickie" department of the industry ground out low grade pap for

the all-night nickelodeons which more than ever on winter nights became warm sanctuaries for the atomic drift of the utterly destitute and damned. Asleep or waking, these lost souls are lulled in dreams. Who shall call unmerciful a civilization that can contrive so vast and efficient a euthanasia?

To meet the challenge of the depression, the bankers, the executives, the directors, technicians, writers and artists who devote themselves to the fabrication of this dream stuff achieved miracles of invention and organization, equaling, if not surpassing, such purely material triumphs as the Ford production line. After all, Ford is concerned merely with the comparatively simple, two-dimensional problem of coördinating men and materials. But the movies is both an industry *and* an art; the producer must manipulate not merely the tangible realities of sets, lighting, the complex techniques of sound photography, the multitude of crafts represented on the mile-square area of a motion picture lot, but also the intangibles of art, of the dream.

The bulk of the motion picture audiences are from 16 to 26 years old. That means that the industry must provide dreams acceptable to the lowest common denominator of that thirty-million-weak, predominantly adolescent audience. Amusement or entertainment—all else is taboo. Young love. Glamor. Sensation. Escape. If the industry fails to give them these it loses its shirt.

The industry tries to serve, yet it does lose its shirt with distressing frequency. In fact, it is estimated that the periodicity of the panic cycle in the motion picture industry

is three or four years, as against seven or eight years for industry as a whole.

The production of each big picture, or dream, is a small war in itself, fought with all the resources of modern science, mobilizing armies of technicians, craftsmen, artists, writers, management experts, research workers, actors, extras, and miscellaneous soldiers and camp followers; conducted in the synthetic dream terrain of the motion picture lot; generaled by over-worked, nerve-shattered executives whose $100,000-a-year jobs hang always by a hair. The war starts when the idea of the picture is born; it accelerates terrifically as soon as the picture goes into production. This dream will cost about $500,000 to make; it must click the box-office turnstiles the world over at least 30,000,000 times before the producer gets a cent out of it. Moreover, when we break the retail price of the dream into its component parts, we find that the manufacturer gets less than 10 per cent of that box-office quarter, or rather seventeen cents, which is the average admission price.

Out of this war a dream must issue which will make the world—not safe exactly, but momentarily endurable for the thirty, fifty, or hundred million people who must dream this dream so that the stars may be paid $2,500 a week, the top executives their bonuses, and the bankers, of course, their proper return on their investment. By this time the bankers own most of the industry. They are trying to stabilize these dream battles, to rationalize these wars, but it isn't easy. Even as I write, their lamentations can be heard all the way from Wall Street to Hollywood.

All is fair in motion picture love and war. War is hell,

but in Hollywood such a soft hell. I sat on the sun porch of one of those admirable neo-Spanish Hollywood villas, vaguely conscious of the meretricious, derivative eloquence of the mocking birds, and watching spellbound the quick, sensitive hands of a motion picture director who was describing with passion the mayhem perpetrated upon his last picture by the collaborative idiocy of writers, supervisors, and the producer. A child of the Russian pogroms, for twenty years engaged in the manufacture of the shoddy dream-stuff by which the producers save their shirts, this man's every gesture was the gesture of an artist. His verbal images were a succession of brilliant camera shots; he thought, felt, lived pictures, not as a merchant but as an artist.

There was no denying the earnestness of the man. He was badly hurt, and not in his pocketbook. He wailed, he gesticulated, he prophesied in language reminiscent of Jeremiah, he invoked the wrath of Jehovah on the miscreants. He all but wept; the blood ran out of his shoes.

To distract him from his grief, someone mentioned King Vidor's recent production, "Our Daily Bread." Instantly, the man's hands moved into interpretive marginalia upon that work which he greatly admired, despite its defects. He too was a farmer, he explained. As a boy of seven he had carried buckets of water and poured them into big vats piped to irrigate the drought-stricken Russian steppe. He remembered sitting in a darkened room after a pogrom, and sharing in the distribution of burned apples to half a dozen starving families.

The grasp of reality, the truth, the passion of the artist were quick in this man, as in scores of other directors,

writers, cameramen, and artists scattered throughout the industry. The reality is evaded, the truth is frustrated, the passion is stultified; that is what, more than anything else, makes Hollywood a hell with Bedlamite trimmings. But the artists are there and a saving percentage of them struggle desperately to put art into pictures. They gloat over small successes; they bleed over their defeats. They rave, risk their jobs, work nights and Sundays, lose their teeth, their hair, and their virtue. For what? Not solely for a lousy fortune. The big salaries paid in the upper brackets are undoubtedly a factor, but one doubts that money alone could command such intensity of effort.

Consider the culminating moment when, after weeks of preparation during which the huge, delicately coördinated resources of the studio have been stretched to the utmost, the big scene of a picture is about to be shot. Ten writers have worked on the script. Squads of carpenters, painters and technicians have timed their effort to reach completion on the particular day when the stars and the director are available according to the terms of their contracts. They have built a battleship swimming in a synthetic ocean, perhaps, or a magnificent cathedral out of sticks and plaster. The lifework of an animal trainer or an electronic engineer is about to be given to the world. The picture, which is already being sold to the distributors for release on a definite date, has already cost fifty, a hundred thousand, five hundred thousand dollars, as well as several nervous breakdowns. A bell rings, a red light goes on outside the studio door, the cameras whir. It is a breathless moment.

Since the advent of sound, the director cannot hiss, as in

the past: "Come on, honey, gimme lust!" But the enforced silence is rich with irony. Much genuine art, much science, and heroic struggle have gone into a collective effort, the net result of which is likely in the majority of cases to be artistically worthless, humanly false, and socially anæsthetic and corruptive. Many of the people involved are aware of this. But when that much money has been spent and that much human effort mobilized toward the objective of giving the flappers of four continents a vicarious thrill, the matter must be taken seriously, on the set at least.

Motion picture people are not lacking in humor. The abler ones laugh well and curse well. Artistically, their occupation tends to be a kind of whoredom and this they freely acknowledge. But they are quick to resent the pharisaism of the outsider who fails to recognize, first, that even at its worst the commercial motion picture exhibits a steadily rising level of craftsmanship; this craftsmanship has values and yields satisfactions in and of itself, and its improvement is clearly due to the concentration of capable writers and artists in Hollywood. Second, there is always the chance of coupling the dream with the reality, of vivifying the contemporary fact—in other words of making this Hollywood hell give birth to a work of art which will be exhibited to a world audience.

It happens occasionally. But Hollywood is hell just the same. The shoddy dream-stuff infects the minds and hearts of those who make it. The fog of dreams drifts back and fills the canyons of this phony, sprawling dream-capital, so that the ceiling is always pretty low and imaginative flights are difficult. Pecuniary values reign. If you want a job in

pictures, they tell you not to be seen lunching with anybody who makes less than $500 a week. Careerism and sycophancy are rife. Nobody is secure. Those who are in set up bars against those who are out. Once out it is hard to come back. A successful screen writer told me he would rather be broke in any other town in the world than in Hollywood. It is shameful, it denotes lack of virtue not to be in a position to command a price for one's virtue. It is a fate worse than death. Your best friends barely speak to you. You skulk around corners.

The life of a star averages six years. Ex-stars haunt the casting offices seeking bit parts. In 1933, 8,000 actors and actresses were listed as seeking employment and only 1,500 were employed. A once famous actress, around whom a million-dollar company was once organized, is now on relief.

Significantly, Hollywood's favorite word is "phony." "It's as phony as Nicholas Murray Butler," commented my guide when, unable to believe that a miraculously convincing reproduction of a Gothic arch was faked, I went up and tapped on its inch-thin canvas and plaster. A while back a group of distinguished naval officers issued from a restaurant to be greeted on the curb by the jeers of the sophisticated Hollywood populace: "Phonies! What picture are youse fellows extras for?"

I had supposed that the Hollywood romances were also phony, but was assured that this is not the case. They are merely life imitating the adolescent pseudo-art of the screen. The stars who marry and divorce with such fluency are not mere slaves of carnality. On the contrary they are

the most idealistic and illusioned of people. Each new romance is a grand passion, the perfect partnership.

This seemed incredible enough, but even more astonishing is the migration of social registerites into the films. Both the fact and a veteran motion picture man's interpretation of the fact are worth recording:

"See the toffs at the next table? They're from Santa Barbara. The pictures give so potent an illusion of class existence that the society people cultivate the motion picture stars. They do bit parts in the glamor films, actually thinking that they are coming into an extension of their own lives.

"Is it possible," he continued, "that the movies are less phony than the lives of the upper classes in this period? Maybe that's it. Maybe the toffs are living in hell; when they get parts in the movies it's as if every so often the damned were permitted to simulate living people."

Dismiss this, if you like, as the theory-spinning of a jealous professional mime. Maybe the movies are not a heaven for the toffs, but filmdom does become a kind of hell for the professionals. Stars, writers, motion picture people in general, feel a certain exile from reality and are worried and distressed by it. The chronic exhibitionism of Hollywood doesn't quite satisfy them. They go to the races at Santa Anita where the payoff on a single Saturday was $500,000, of which the track got 8 per cent and the state 4 per cent. All the screen notables are there, and the fact that Mr. Zauberstein, the writer, is seen with Mr. Spielberg, the producer, is supposed to help keep Mr. Zauberstein in the money.

But it is all pretty phony. Every now and then some of

the more gifted and sensitive motion picture people try to break out of the dream world of Hollywood. They want to establish some contact with the real world of strikes, of destitution, of social and political crisis which is never shown in the pictures except when some socially conscious producer like King Vidor takes the bit in his teeth and gambles his own money. These rebels clandestinely attend Marxian study classes. They listen sympathetically to the miseries of the lettuce workers toiling in the Imperial Valley a couple of hundred miles south. They too would like to live authentically in the real world, if only their contracts would permit them to do so.

But the contracts are very specific. The slave of the screen owes a duty to his public. He must risk no publicity which would impair the box-office value of his name. So that for the most part Hollywood keeps faith with the dream and chews the sour cud of its own phoniness.

It is, in fact, a jealous and exclusive phoniness; a moated and ramparted hell. When you come in from the outside, everybody suspects you of "trying to break into the movies"; in other words, of wanting to ladle up, for a price, some of the dream-stuff brewed in this hell.

Agents, directors, producers, writers, are closely guarded by their secretaries. The private telephone is almost universal. I phoned a well-known writer's secretary and was subjected to a formal inquisition. Why did I want to see Mr. Smith? Did I want a job? What kind of a job? Finally, I blew up and declaimed: "Listen, I'm the only man in the world who doesn't want a job in this damned town. I'm unique. I'm colossal."

The secretary was completely unmoved and completely

skeptical. Rightly so, I reflected, as I hung up the receiver.

The movies, potentially at least, is the greatest art form we have and the greatest medium of social communication. Of course, I'd give my shirt to do something with the movies. So would almost any writer. But the ramparts are high and the people inside are pretty sad-eyed. Breaking in is only the beginning. The real job is to do something serious after you get in. However, the movies, I reflected, are no different in this respect from any other industry. Newspapermen are in the same fix. And engineers —any group of workers, in fact, in relation to the false and exploitative conditions of their employment. I had a look at the briefs submitted to the NRA by the Screen Actors Guild and the Screen Writers Guild and became convinced that as respects labor relations the movie industry does not differ essentially from any other highly developed mass production industry.

Will the Dream-Makers Strike?

The Screen Writers Guild and the Screen Actors Guild, having made the complete circuit of the National Run Around, are fighting for their rights under the Wagner Labor Relations Bill, and to this end have filed briefs with the new Labor Board. The producers, as might be expected, assert, first, that the shipment of positive film has nothing to do with interstate commerce, and second, that the law is unconstitutional anyway.

A mere listing of the elements of the present situation in Hollywood will indicate how closely it approximates

the standard labor relations setup in almost any mass production industry. Roughly, these elements are:

1. A vertical union of actors, called the Screen Actors Guild, but in fact a union with an A. F. of L. charter, affiliated with the Associated Actors and Artistes of America, which is controlled by Actors Equity. The membership is approximately 2,500 and ranges in status all the way from $10,000-a-week stars like Eddie Cantor, its president, to free-lance actors who are lucky if they make $2,500 a year.

2. A vertical union of writers, called the Screen Writers Guild, affiliated with the Authors League, with a membership of about 800, ranging in membership from $50,000-a-year pen pushers to $50-a-week studio hacks.

3. A company union, called the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, organized by Louis B. Mayer and Douglas Fairbanks in 1927, with branches for writers, directors, actors, producers, and technicians. Hollywood cynics refer to the Academy as a "double bastard out of the French Academy," without explaining the genealogical implications of the phrase. It gives annual prizes, pretends to prescribe minimum contracts, adjusts wage, contract and other disputes, and otherwise attempts to harmonize employer-employee relations on the "one happy family" theory. It has full recognition from the producers, and is in fact their creature, whereas the Guilds have none except such recognition as is implied by the bootleg negotiations conducted with the producers by the Guilds in behalf of their members. By this time there are comparatively few actors and writers left in the Academy.

4. A labor pool consisting in effect of most of the actors and writers of America and of all foreign countries including the Scandinavian.

5. Huge disparities of compensation and of treatment as between the producers, the executives, the stars and the lower professional and labor categories. In 1931, 75 executives received an average of $92,000 apiece, or 2.68% of the gross receipts of the industry. In 1933, 70 executives received an average of $53,000 apiece, or 1.89% of the gross. In 1933, 5,134 actors, including the stars, received an average of $3,298 apiece, and 266,000 extra players received $9.54 apiece. Three hundred and seven writers regularly employed received an average of $13,500 apiece, while 707 writers not regularly employed received an average of $2,750 apiece. The 17,678 studio mechanics received an average of $513 apiece. The 17,678 clerical workers received an average of $1,309 apiece. Taking the total number of 317,000 individuals employed in the movies in 1933, the average compensation was $256 apiece. Implicit in these figures, of course, are a high degree of irregularity and insecurity of employment, and, considering the reputation of the movies as a source of easy money, an astonishingly low level of compensation for the lower professional and labor categories.

6. An industry in the throes of the "rationalization" prescribed by the bankers who own most of it, and in the red since 1932. The industry had gross receipts of $259,000,000 in 1931 and showed a net profit of $18,000,000. In 1932 the gross was $209,000,000 and the net loss $26,000,000. In 1933 the gross was $197,000,000 and the net loss $9,000,000.

7. A red-baiting factor susceptible of effective exploitation when, as, and if the producers get in a tight spot. Witness the attempt of the Hearst press to discredit James Cagney because of his highly creditable sympathy for California's exploited "stoop labor" in the lettuce fields, and the resignation of Sam Ornitz from the executive board of the Screen Writers Guild. (It is worth noting that without exception the actors and writers on whom the red label has been pinned are among the most gifted and capable artists in Hollywood.)

Just how, one is moved to ask, does this setup differ from the standard labor relations setup in almost any highly developed mass production industry? It does not differ essentially, but there are certain special conditions which the producers, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as the instrument of the producers, have chosen to emphasize for understandable reasons. Their thesis, often reiterated, is that the actors and writers whose more or less synthetic reputations dazzle the eyes, confound the ears, and nourish the illusions of the planetary multitude—that these are gentle people, artists, professional men and women; that it would be shameful to demean them to the status of mere laborers in filmdom's garden of dreams. They are not, so runs the argument, replaceable parts in an industrial machine, but individuals of varying capacity whose value to the industry is a matter of demand measurable at the box office. They are therefore quite capable of protecting themselves by individual bargaining and in fact do so quite successfully. This argument applies, of course, only to the stars and to the leading directors and writers, and to them only with

considerable qualification. When the attention of the magnates is called to some of the wage statistics above cited, they reek with sentimental concern, but tend to be deficient in the matter of remedies, as well as highly resistant to the present drive for union organization. By and large, in fact, the movie employers are just about as stiff-necked as U. S. Steel or General Motors. They are represented by exceedingly capable counsel, and it is interesting to note that the same firm represents both the producers and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. One is reminded of the National Steel Labor Board hearings in Pittsburgh, when counsel for the company union and counsel for the steel corporation sat together, swapped notes, and pounded the table in unison.

The issues for which the Guilds are fighting are, first, recognition by the producers, without which it is difficult to exercise effective pressure toward the correction of the numerous abuses suffered by both actors and writers. But recognition is precisely what the producers are determined not to grant; the more it is urged, the more elaborate the build-up of the Academy which, while theoretically representing the interests of all who are involved, remains securely in the control of the producers. The screen actors, through Equity, have been fighting vainly for recognition for fifteen years. For the writers, the break came with the threat of the 50 per cent permanent cut in 1933. At that time Ralph Block, president of the Screen Writers Guild in 1934, and Oliver Garett resigned from the Academy, openly calling it a company union, and attempted to put some life into the Screen Writers Guild which had been organized some years before. With the advent of the NRA,

the producers saw a chance to "rationalize" the business, specifically by setting up a general booking office and controlling inter-studio competition for the services of actors and writers. Both Guilds had to fight the disabilities placed upon them in the first drafts of the Motion Picture Code. There followed a period of jockeying back and forth between Washington and Hollywood, out of which eventuated the present stalemate.

Among the major grievances recited in the brief submitted by the Screen Actors Guild are the following:

That in 1933 one quarter of the 1,563 actors who worked made less than $1,000, one-half made less than $2,000 and three quarters made less than $5,000. In addition it is pointed out that this less-than-professional wage is paid during an exceptionally brief working life.

According to the report of the Motion Picture Code Administrator, Sol Rosenblatt, the actors received only one and three quarters cents of each dollar that came into the box office. The actors' brief therefore concludes with some reason that "if a betterment in actors' working conditions doubled the cost of actors' salaries, it would not even make a dent in the business." The brief also calls attention to the heavy "take" of the film executives, especially the split to Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg, and Robert Rubin, which totaled $8,320,173 in the four years of 1929-32. It points out that while the five-year no-strike agreement, negotiated in 1930 through the Academy, guaranteed a twelve-hour rest period between calls, and continuous employment, both concessions were subsequently abrogated in practice. An important clause in the working rules proposed in the Actors Guild brief is that forbidding

an actor to waive the rules. Although the present Academy free-lance contract makes compulsory a twelve-hour rest period, the Guild brief points out that "whenever the producer does not want to give a twelve-hour rest period he asks the actor to waive it, and most actors, needing work and not being in a strong enough position to demand their rights, are forced to waive the provision whether they like it or not."

Since the advent of sound, the position of the writers in the industry has been strengthened. The Screen Writers Guild now has about 800 members and although it is not recognized by the producers, it settled last year about 145 disputes between its members and their employers. The Guild's membership contract cannot be invalidated by resignation and is enforcible by a $10,000 fine. It has a rule, thus far inoperative, which provides that "no member shall collaborate with a non-guild member." In other words the Guild has the machinery for achieving a closed shop, if it should ever become powerful enough to stage an effective strike or threat of strike.

Laymen accustomed to regard Hollywood as a fountain of easy money are invited to consider the present weekly wages of the readers on whose synopses the magnates of the industry base their imperial decisions. These salaries run from nothing at all—it's your chance to learn the business—to an average of $47.50 and $50 at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Paramount. Much of the reading is done on a piece-work basis—$2 to $5 for synopsizing a full-length novel. The translators are equally exploited and the Guild's demand for a $50-a-week minimum is modest enough in all conscience.

As was expected, the producers attempted to take the edge off the Screen Actors' brief by instituting through the Academy a new five-year basic agreement and minimum contract which embody a number of concessions, but evade the basic question at issue. That is the recognition of an actors' union strong enough and independent enough to protect its members and ensure the observance of fair-practice rules. The producers have adopted a similar procedure with respect to the writers.

It seems likely that sooner or later, the screen actors and writers, like the steel and automotive workers, will become convinced that the administration either will not or cannot help them, and that they will have to help themselves without benefit of Washington. When that time arrives, the dream-makers may or may not strike for the objective to which all others are now subordinated, the Guild shop. If they don't, they will continue to suffer from the progressive "rationalization" of the industry, designed to keep the executive salaries pretty much intact, but to reduce the other elements of production cost sufficiently to restore profits. If they strike and win they may be in a position to consider the wider social implications of their employment. A degree of self-respect and security for the dream-makers would certainly result in an improvement of their product—and maybe the producers wouldn't lose their shirts after all.

It is interesting to speculate upon the social consequences of even a brief suspension of Hollywood's activities. Hollywood is the circus department of an economy and culture which has reached the bread-and-circuses stage. Cut out the circuses and the struggle for bread

might be intensified; the masses might be tempted to dream their own dreams—even to stage their own mob scenes. Conceivably, the administration has more than one reason for not wanting a strike of the dream-makers.

26

NOT GREEK, BUT ROMAN

WHILE I was in the Middle West, it seemed to me that Detroit, the capital of Mobilia, was the key city of America. But after a stay of six weeks in California, I began to realize that the economic and political activities centering about Los Angeles give that city an almost equal significance.

Ironically enough, the manufacture of the American dream is concentrated in a physical area that reeks with the grimmest of social and economic facts. The city state which Los Angeles has erected in the southern California desert is not Greek, but Roman; and so terrific is the pace of the modern social process that already, after a brief half-century of soaring expansion, one saw that the empire of Chandler and Hearst was entering its decadent period. Still growing, that desert puff-ball was softening at the core. In the earlier period, while the American capitalist economy was still expanding, Los Angeles had sucked the juice of middle-class savings from the entire continent. It was these middle-class hordes who had swarmed over those sun-drenched hills and raised a katydid chant of peace and plenty, until—

Until the depression touched their modest vines and fig trees with the first breath of an economic autumn that these half-independent sitters-in-the-sun had never counted

on. They suffered more or less patiently until the election of 1934, when, from the point of view of those stern pro-consuls, Hearst and Chandler, they went wild. They found an admirably representative leader in Upton Sinclair, with his Savonarola-like countenance, his genius for publicity, and his extraordinary capacity for hypnotizing himself and others with pseudo-revolutionary pipe-dreams.

In a way, EPIC was the revolution gone Hollywood. At first the pro-consuls and their satraps in both southern and northern California didn't take it seriously. I talked to some professional publicity people who had been hired to back-fire the political conflagration that almost swept Sinclair into office. They told me indignantly that not until the last two months of the campaign did the big shots become scared enough to overcome their characteristic financial inhibitions. But in that last-minute panic they shoveled out the cash in every direction. It was, as Sinclair has testified, a thoroughly brutal and unscrupulous job. The publicity hacks referred to hurriedly divided the population of the state into realistic sociological classifications: so many Baptists, Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, and other fundamentalists; so many Christian Scientists, so many Mormons, etc. They then proceeded to excerpt passages from the voluminous works of Mr. Sinclair, and by appropriate demagogic devices demonstrate to the electorate that Sinclair was against God, against the Home, against Mary Baker Eddy, against everything the sitters-in-the-sun were supposed to be for.

It worked, to a degree. What really turned the tide, however, was the coercion of the employed section of the voters by their employers. In the end, almost the whole of California business and industry was mobilized to beat

Sinclair, including, of course, the motion picture industry. Every dream-maker was asked to contribute a day of fast and prayer in order to make California safe for M.G.M., Paramount, Warner Brothers, Carl Laemmle, Jr., etc., and few, indeed, were in a position to decline.

I talked to one of the eminent functionaries who had helped to mobilize the dream-makers against Sinclair, and he struck me as one of the funniest Romans of them all. He was, he assured me, a liberal and a pacifist. He had just fought, bled and died—vainly, he admitted—to induce a big producer to film Sir Philip Gibbs' latest fictional effort in the field of painless pacifism. He was a friendly soul who, like so many of the Hollywood dignitaries, steamed devotion to Art and loyalty to the Flag out of every pore. Was he Sincere? I think so. Hollywood specializes in the manufacture of Sincere Phonies, just as the advertising business manufactures Sincere Snobs.

Mr. Hearst is not funny, but many of his drummer boys are. This, I reflected, was much like the Rome of the later Cæsars. One has only to read Terence and other writers of the Roman decadence, to realize that the plutocrats of that period were funny enough after their fashion.

Nevertheless, the empire of southern California was, I felt, destined to expand even during the declining phase of the national capitalist economy. In the regional competition which would characterize the period ahead, southern California was well-equipped to survive. Water and power, the major physiographic requirements, would soon be available from Boulder Dam. With sufficient water, the productivity of the Imperial, Coachella, and other valleys could be greatly expanded. The port of Los Angeles was steadily being improved—it too would be an important

base of military operations in the event of a war in the Pacific. Moreover, Los Angeles business was already hierarchical, and at least potentially fascist; it was far ahead of San Francisco in that respect. As for the tendency of the increasingly destitute middle class to revolt, that would be taken care of, along fascist lines, when the necessity arose. The centralization of power was already achieved. The corporative forms of its administration—the Associated Farmers, Anti-Communist League, etc., were already emerging. Clearly Los Angeles had a future—a fascist future.

How quickly that future was shading into the present I was soon to learn.

During my last days in Hollywood I noticed an El Centro newspaper dispatch to the effect that two lettuce workers had been killed by deputized strikebreakers. It was a suspiciously muted and colorless story, and thinking that the newspapers to which I contributed might want a special article, I wired them. Two editors immediately authorized me to send stories. Fine. I had always been curious about the Imperial Valley. Ellis O. Jones had been telling me about the sojourn in the desert he suffered when he tried to defend the cause of civil liberty in the Valley. In addition, I had before me the long record of beatings and expulsions which had followed the attempts of the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union to organize the "stoop labor" of the Valley during the preceding year. But in this instance I was merely a newspaperman after a story. So that when I pointed my car for El Centro, it never occurred to me that I might be heading for trouble.

27

WELCOME TO EL CENTRO

(Dispatch to the *New York Evening Post*)

SENTINEL, Arizona.—I am writing this in the lee of a cactus about a hundred miles east of the California border, across which I and my traveling companion were escorted three hours ago by six deputy sheriffs representing the law and order of the Imperial Valley. We stayed three days and three nights in El Centro, county seat of Imperial County, less than twenty-four hours of which were spent in jail. That, if not a record, is well above the average achieved by the assorted liberals, radicals, preachers, journalists and lawyers who have visited the Valley during the past year.

As you may have heard, the Valley has been having a strike of the lettuce packers and trimmers, which was climaxed ten days ago by the killing of two strikers by armed and deputized strikebreakers. As a cruising journalist, I was duly authorized to write two lettuce stories for two publications, presenting both sides of the controversy, and, please, no Russian dressing. Accordingly, in my sly subversive way, I presented my credentials to the Sheriff, the army captain who represented the United States Department of Labor, the deputy labor commissioner for the state, the county health officer, the state emergency relief

director, the local newspapers, C. B. Lawrence, Secretary-Treasurer of the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union of California, the respectable A. F. of L. union that staged the strike, Fred Bright, a prominent lettuce and cantaloupe grower and shipper, and Chester B. Moore, Secretary of the Western Growers Protective Association. The disproportion in this list would seem, if anything, to favor the employers. If the story slants the other way, it is, first, because that is the slant of the facts and, second, because Chet Moore cut short our welcome to El Centro. The police escort, incidentally, was at our request; we heard rumors of vigilantes organizing.

Maybe I do Chet wrong, but it was strangely coincident that my second interview with Mr. Moore occurred on the morning of the day of our arrest; that at this interview he showed me in high dudgeon a Washington dispatch printed in the *New York Evening Post* summarizing the Leonard-Lubin report of the Communist-led strike in the Valley last year; that he said then that if at the previous interview he had known I represented any such biased, subversive sheet, he would have kicked me out.

Finally, Chet presided beamingly over the tableau that afternoon when the Sheriff and a dozen deputies and stool pigeons went through my car and crowed over the assorted radical literature it contained. They found everything from the Proletarian Party and the Communist League of Action to Chamber of Commerce boost literature and a booklet touting Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning. One of the stools insisted on reading this booklet through from cover to cover; I suspect he thought it was written in code. I twitched at his sleeve and tried to say a good word for

my own book, *Our Master's Voice: Advertising,* but he sternly pushed me aside. Another one ran off with Lewis Corey's *Decline of American Capitalism* like an ant pushing a big crumb. Out of the tail of my eye I saw a third mired in the second volume of *Recent Social Changes.* I think that one died seeking air.

Asked to explain this literature, I suggested that this was perhaps the normal haul of a reporter who had been four months on the road trying to get a notion of what was happening to the country. As to my personal views, I was certainly a radical, although not at the moment a member of any political party. In fact I had spent fifteen years writing my opinions in books, magazines, and newspapers. It was not wholly my fault, I intimated sadly, that apparently I didn't have a single reader in the entire Imperial Valley. As to my mission in El Centro, it was purely journalistic. I had been getting the facts about the strike and its background—that, and nothing else, as the stupid stools who had been tailing us knew perfectly well.

Meanwhile, this mob of Mack Sennett cops and stools kept rummaging through my personal correspondence, pawing over a dozen undecipherable notebooks, and otherwise comporting themselves in terms of stale burlesque. My companion, Charles Malamuth, a near-sighted Russian Jew, by training a philologist, to whom I had offered transportation across the continent, behaved nobly. He squinted critically at their language until he had the sheriff and his deputies hesitating over their verbs and adjectives like spavined nags facing a water jump.

In the end they stuffed us in the El Centro can, already crowded with the seventeen strikers arrested since the

strike, plus assorted American, Mexican, and Indian petty offenders and deportees. Not altogether to our surprise, we found that the best people of the Imperial Valley were in jail. Moreover, they were in hearty agreement with us as to the Hollywood-infected phoniness of the forces of law and order. Whatever Chet Moore forgot to tell us about the lettuce business we learned from the prisoners. We didn't eat lettuce, of course, although it was wasting in the fields all around us. We ate bread and potatoes and oatmeal and dried peaches, supplemented by sugar and milk bought and distributed coöperatively by the prisoners through their kangaroo courts, which duly tried and fined us for being dumb enough to come into the Imperial Valley at all. My cell block had a population of seventeen, with bunks for ten, so I slept on a couple of mattresses spread in the corridor.

Malamuth was more fortunate, being befriended by no less a personage than H. J. McGuire, the deputized strikebreaker who is alleged to have shot and killed Paul Knight in the course of the trouble on Sunday, Feb. 17, when another striker, Kenneth Hamaker, is alleged to have been killed by another deputized strikebreaker, Rudy Jensen. McGuire and Jensen are being held for the grand jury investigation which begins next week. It seems probable that neither one of them will be prosecuted. But they too will need police escorts when they leave the Valley, and since fruit tramps wander widely, their usefulness as strikebreakers anywhere west of the Mississippi seems ended.

The strike was fading when we reached El Centro. During the first days the union had signed up eight sheds to

the Salinas contract based on the award of the Regional Labor Board, headed by George Creel, which arbitrated the Salinas strike last year. It was the resistance of the growers to the application of this award to the Imperial Valley that brought about the strike. This resistance was organized and led by Chet Moore, whose chief function seems to be that of labor fixer for the big grower-shippers. The strike was practically ended by the time we left town; local artisans, high school boys, and hitch-hikers, including a woman with a dog, were pulled in to pack and trim lettuce. Both jobs require some skill and the growers undoubtedly lost a good deal of money through spoiled lettuce and inferior packs. They stand to lose more if the boycott of scab brands, which is being instituted by the A. F. of L., is at all effective.

However, most of the strikers have either gone back to work or left for other areas, and Chet Moore has scored a "victory." He has convinced the fruit tramps that for all practical purposes there is no difference between the grower-shippers and the forces of "law and order." Sheriff Bob Ware is himself a pea grower, Chief of Police Sterling Oswalt is a lettuce grower and his brother, Frank Oswalt, heads the forces of the state highway patrol. The fruit tramps are further convinced that there is very little difference between the treatment accorded the strikers, organized with an A. F. of L. charter, and the short shrift given the Communists who organized the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union last year. They are sore, and openly contemptuous of both the grower-shippers and the police; of the former because, in their opinion, they have neither enough brains nor enough collective integrity to

stop chiseling both their workers and each other, and establish tolerable conditions in the industry; of the latter, because they are hysterical with red phobia and have obviously gone Hollywood, with the consequence that two decent workers were quite unnecessarily killed by deputized strikebreakers who, at the very least, should never have been armed with guns.

It may seem that the picture of the Valley police as Mack Sennett tragi-comedians is overdrawn and personal. It is not. Just before noon of the day we were released, a hundred per cent American lettuce striker was brought into my cell block, and the judge of the kangaroo court made his customary request for a contribution to the mutual fund.

"Hell," he shouted. "I'll be out of here in two hours. Those —— —— —— ba—ds have their nerve thinking they can push me around. Grease balls, maybe, but not me. You'd think this was some —— —— foreign country. These goddamned phony deputies have been reading detective stories. A guy comes up to me, no uniform, and says I'm pinched, and starts shoving me. I lugged him one, the —— —— ——, and his buddy comes up and I tell them to keep their filthy hands off me, the bunch of hick cops. . . . Look at this damned can! If a big timer got in here by mistake he'd go through it like Pluto water."

He steamed off like this for an hour, and he wasn't bluffing either. His lawyer came and he got out in considerably less than two hours.

We said good-by to Sheriff Ware at one o'clock of the day following our arrest. He had learned by wire that I was some kind of a newspaperman after all, but he offered

no apologies. The Sheriff was once a fruit tramp himself and personally seems a decent fellow, though handicapped by the granite profile of a Hollywood mountie. He has been put in a bad spot by the big shippers and he doesn't like either them or the spot he is in. But he is a part of the local red hysteria.

28

BREAD-AND-BUTTER LETTER

Mr. Robert Ware, Sheriff of Imperial County
(The lowest down sheriff's office in the world)
El Centro, Calif.

Dear Comrade Ware:

Six months is a long time to postpone the writing of the customary "bread-and-butter letter" which is due you because of your thoughtfulness in according me and my traveling companion the hospitality of the El Centro jail. Please excuse this delay. I have been busy after my fashion, and doubtless you have been busy after your fashion. But I have thought of you often, Comrade Ware, and not always in terms of the unmixed hostility which you perhaps expected.

A sheriff is after all a human being. Even a stool pigeon, I suppose, is human, although concerning the latter form of life there is much to be said on both sides. But you are an elected officer; moreover, you told me that you were once a fruit tramp. Finally, our too-brief acquaintance convinced me that you were miscast as an Imperial County sheriff. That's a stool-pigeon's job, Comrade Ware, and you don't really like stool pigeons any more than I do.

It would have been pleasant, Comrade Ware, if instead

of having your deputies escort me out of the Valley, you had said something like this:

"Comrade (the words 'pal' and 'brother' are also used among friendly and coöperative people), don't let's have any hard feelings. If you have nothing else on for tonight, have dinner with me. I know a little Mexican joint where we can get away from this mob of dumb cops and stool pigeons—especially the stool pigeons—and have a good heart-to-heart talk."

I would have accepted with pleasure, Comrade Ware, and here are some of the things I would have said to you:

First, concerning your jail. The nature of our society is clearly defined by the physical arrangement and sub-human atmosphere of our jails; they instantly dissolve the make-believe of justice, order, humanity, with which we beguile the tedium between revolution and revolution. Every prisoner is bound to realize, the moment the door of the cell block closes upon him, that this jail exists, not to enforce justice and to discipline, rehabilitate, and re-socialize offenders, but to remove, conceal and ultimately to destroy the evidence of our social failure. As a society, we bury the evidence of our social crimes in jails, work-houses, poor farms, until this evidence becomes mountainous, so that there are not jails enough to hold it.

Then the law becomes military law, the justice military justice, and the human evidences of our social failure are shot down without trial. The machine gun rattle of this "justice" again dissolves the make-believe, but this time in the open air, where all can see it, reflect, and learn. We realize then—yes, you too, Comrade Ware, must realize it some day—that the sands of this society are running out,

and the hour-glass must soon reverse itself. For what has happened is this: the state has become the criminal and the people its victims.

By this time the best people are either in jail—as today in Germany—or threatened with jail, with torture, with death. The balance is broken and must right itself. There must be a new state, and the people come out, the prisoners of starvation come out. They revolt and erect a new state on the grave of the state that has died. It is not true that revolutionaries destroy the state power, Comrade Ware. It is you, and even more the panic-stricken, violent, and doomed people whom you serve—it is you who destroy the state. Social revolutionaries can and do take power only when the capitalist state has destroyed itself, when power and responsibility are to be had almost for the asking, and when only revolutionaries have enough moral and intellectual integrity left to essay the gigantic task of reconstruction.

This task is likely to entail more jailing and shooting, always a brutal and inhuman business; but the hour-glass cannot be turned back, nor can the sick-to-death society heal itself without purging. The hope is always that the new state power will "wither away"—be superseded by the functional, democratic forms of a coöperative society, although this hope has not yet been fulfilled.

This is the process as revolutionaries see it, as even conservative historians see it, when decades and centuries of time have cushioned the impact of events and made it safe to tell how and why they happened. You were convinced, Comrade Ware, that I was a revolutionary, a Communist. I appreciated the compliment, I assure you, but in all fair-

ness I must decline it. I am not a member of the Communist Party, of the Workers Party, or of any other revolutionary group. I am not, in other words, one of our best people whom it is your business to put in jail; whom the Associated Farmers are organized to beat, and tar and feather, and shoot.

You had one of those best people in your jail when I was there, Comrade Ware, and you must have noticed the difference. You had jailed Emma Cutler, an organizer for the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union, as a "vagrant" three hours after she had arrived in the Valley. You knew that the charge was false. You knew that you were executing the terms of an illegal, hence criminal, miscarriage of justice. And you soon came to know the quality of your prisoner, just as the wardens at San Quentin are learning the quality of the seven members of the Communist Party and one member of the Workers Party who are imprisoned there, for much longer terms.

Miss Cutler, as you told my friend Charles Malamuth, was in some respects a "model prisoner": self-disciplined, composed, industrious—she spent much of her time sewing for herself and friends. She was indeed, from all accounts, one of our best people, and the most unfortunate thing about it, from your point of view, was that her fellow prisoners were beginning to catch the infection of her superior quality. In other words, she continued to be a Communist and to teach Communism, so that in jail or out, she seems likely to be a permanent menace to the increasing criminality of the capitalist state.

You see how it works out, Comrade Ware. Eventually, when the hour-glass reverses itself, the categories of best

and worst will have become pretty clearly defined and separated. It will then be a matter simply of releasing the best people and incarcerating the worst; the latter not for long, I hope—only until it is possible to reëmploy them at socially serviceable tasks and reëducate them into the pattern of a socialized and relatively functional economy and culture.

There will be, of course, a considerable accumulation of social débris to dispose of: turnkeys, stool pigeons, business and financial racketeers and their middle-class snuggle-pups, horse-headed military people, the degenerate, unemployable dregs of the lumpenproletariat which our diseased capitalist metabolism is excreting at an accelerating rate. I hope you won't be in any of these categories, Comrade Ware, for barring a certain naïve capacity for he-man histrionism, and a certain gravely discreditable subserviency to power as such, you seemed a rather decent fellow.

The chief trouble with you as I saw it, Comrade Ware, was that you didn't know enough. For example, you were unable to understand my rôle, and the conflicting hypotheses offered by your stool pigeons didn't help matters at all. I was exactly what I described myself to be: a writer employed, at the moment, by capitalist newspapers to do a particular job of reporting. Over and above that I was a United States citizen, holding radical political and social views which I was fully entitled, under the law, to hold and to express.

I was not then and am not now one of our best people as I have defined the phrase: my own rôle has thus far entailed no such sacrifices, hardships, and dangers as fall to their lot. Mine is none the less, I believe, a legitimate and

permanently useful rôle. I happen to believe that a writer owes a responsibility to the written word which he cannot violate without stultifying himself and destroying his usefulness to civilization. And I am convinced that at present, and for the immediate future, an American writer cannot fully discharge that responsibility if he accepts either the discipline of any existing revolutionary party or the implicit bribes involved in the acceptance of most of the well-paid literary employments offered to him under capitalism.

At various times I have attempted to aid and support the activities of the Communist Party, the Workers Party, and the Socialist Party, and shall continue to do so. But not at the sacrifice of my particular function, which is to tell the truth as I see it. Telling the truth means, for example, telling that the Communist Party does not always tell the truth. It means repudiating the lie as a tactic, whether used by capitalists, fascists, socialists, or communists of whatever faction.

Do I make myself clear, Comrade Ware? I have made myself very clear to the Communist Party, for many of whose members and sympathizers I have great respect, although I disagree profoundly with many of their politics and tactics. For this I have been denounced in the Communist press as a "counter-revolutionary," "potential fascist," etc.—factional canards that no intelligent person takes seriously, not even their party-disciplined authors. They have not deterred me from continuing to point out that the "ends-justify-the-means" philosophy invoked to validate such tactics is not truly communist, but fanatical, jesuitical, and highly dangerous to the building of a sound revolutionary movement.

By this time, Comrade Ware, I imagine that you are pretty much bewildered. You are asking, perhaps, why build a revolutionary movement at all? Because the utter bankruptcy and chaos of the capitalist economy and the capitalist culture is, in my opinion, imminent. It is therefore necessary to erect the scaffolding of a revolutionary receivership that will be strong enough and sound enough and honest enough to take over that bankruptcy and exercise sanely and creatively the power that the logic of events will ultimately place in its hands. Be a little realistic, Comrade Ware. Would you have the effrontery to deny that the capitalist economy and the capitalist state in the Imperial Valley is at this moment bankrupt with respect to practically all its pretensions of law, order, economic health, and human decency?

Let's start with the little matter of civil liberties, guaranteed to us all under the Constitution. After your deputies escorted me across the state line I headed straight for Phœnix, Arizona, and you must have guessed why. I wanted to talk to General Pelham D. Glassford and get from him another copy of the report which you found in my files and which, apparently, you failed to return after you had ransacked them. I did get a copy of that report made to the Department of Labor, the Department of Agriculture and the National Labor Board, and this is what it said:

After more than two months of observation and investigation in the Imperial Valley, it is my conviction that a group of growers have exploited a "Communist" hysteria for the advancement of their own interests; that they have welcomed

labor agitation which they could brand as "red" as a means of sustaining supremacy by mob rule, thereby preserving what is so essential to their profits—cheap labor; that they have succeeded in drawing into their conspiracy certain county officials who have become the principal tools of their machine.

Coming from a former army officer of high rank and a representative of the Federal government, this is strong language. Back of it lies the personal experience of General Glassford and his Secretary, now Mrs. Glassford, during their two months' stay in the Valley. Their telephone line was tapped and the confidence that is supposed to surround telegraphic communications by Western Union and Postal Telegraph was violated. They lived in an atmosphere of fear and espionage. Few persons would talk; those who did insisted that they be not quoted. Those who wrote rarely signed their communications. Mrs. Glassford told me that only after they had left the Valley did she feel able to draw a free breath—this, from the assistant of a special investigator acting with the full authority of the Federal government.

Most of the dynamite in General Glassford's report was suppressed, Comrade Ware; ask your guide, philosopher, and friend, Chester B. Moore, secretary of the Vegetable Growers Protective Association, why and how it was suppressed. Oh, well, don't bother. I'll tell you: it was suppressed because it was a true report; because the wisdom and statesmanship of the incorporated shipper-growers of the Imperial Valley have only one solution for the problem of restoring peace in the Valley—that solution being the incitement and manipulation of a mob terror suf-

ficiently violent and unchallenged by county, state or Federal authorities to extinguish all opposition. They and you didn't want that to be told, Comrade Ware. That was why your crowd suppressed General Glassford's report and why you jailed and deported me. Here, Comrade Ware, is a condensed but substantially accurate picture of the economy and culture of that below-sea-level agricultural paradise of which you are the legal custodian:

The major crops in the Imperial Valley are lettuce, cantaloupe, peas, and carrots—all grown "out of season" with respect to eastern markets, all highly perishable, all produced on irrigated desert land lying at or below sea level. The conditions of production are industrial rather than agricultural in the older sense. Ninety per cent of the crops in the Valley are grown or financed by a small group of shipper-growers. Among the largest of these shipper-growers, most of whom also operate in other lettuce-growing regions, including the Salinas Valley of California, the Salt River Valley of Arizona, south Texas and even Florida, are American Fruit Growers, with 665 acres in lettuce in the Imperial Valley, S. A. Gerrard Company with 1,200 acres, and the M. C. Wahl Company with 600 acres. It was in the Wahl shed in El Centro that two strikers were shot and killed by armed and deputized strikebreakers the week before I arrived in the Valley. Through a pro-rating agreement the lettuce acreage in the Imperial Valley, which was approximately 30,000 acres in 1933, was reduced for the 1934-35 season to 16,789 acres. Of this acreage only 3,510 acres are tilled by so-called "independent" growers—whose independence, incidentally, is highly qualified by the fact that the big shipper-growers to whom most of

them sell control the facilities for packing and shipping, and hence can more or less set the price paid to the growers. The same situation applies, in approximately the same degree, to the other major crops.

Labor in this industrialized agriculture divides into two categories: the shed workers and the field or "stoop labor." The former, in general, are 100 per cent American fruit tramps. Many of them have a semi-permanent employee status with respect to the large shipper-growers and move from one area to another as the crops mature. Since the depression, however, the numbers of these migratory workers have been greatly increased by all sorts of destitute and dispossessed people: industrial and white collar workers from the cities, whole families of dispossessed share-croppers from Oklahoma, Texas, and the deep South.

The field workers, or "stoop labor," are chiefly Mexicans. In the report of Will J. French, J. L. Leonard and Simon J. Lubin to the National Labor Board, dated Feb. 11, 1934, it was estimated that there were then in the Valley about 15,000 Mexicans, 3,000 Filipinos and smaller groups of Japanese, Negroes, and Hindus. Since then there has been a considerable "repatriation" of Mexicans for whom, because of the reduced production of lettuce and other crops, there was no employment. But to compensate for this there has been a fairly constant movement of Mexicans across the border, as well as a steady increase in the movement of migratories from the east into the Valley. So that whereas there were in January, 1934, between 4,000 and 5,000 unemployed in the Valley, plus their women and children, the number had increased rather than decreased

a year later when I was there. John R. Lestner, the deputy labor commissioner in El Centro, estimated that whereas there is employment for 5,000 to 7,000 stoop laborers, there are now in the Valley from 8,000 to 10,000 Mexicans plus 5,000 Filipinos. In 1932 the hourly scale for stoop labor dropped to as low as 10 cents; this year it was 25 cents, but despite the efforts of the labor commissioner to enforce the state law, the workers continue to be chiseled and exploited by the labor contractors who sell them at so much a head to the growers.

The three-men-to-one job surplus of stoop labor is fully matched by the surplus of shed workers. It was this surplus, together with the strong-arm methods of the growers, that broke the strike of lettuce packers and trimmers this year. The shed owners simply went out on the highway and picked up migratories, with the result that by the end of the strike about a thousand new packers and trimmers had been added to the labor pool.

All this labor is heavily subsidized by relief. Both for stoop labor and shed labor the scale is so low and employment so intermittent that only at the peaks of the harvest seasons do the workers make subsistence wages. You hear tales of the big stakes made by the fruit tramps when the harvest is heavy; but the sober estimate of the U. S. Department of Labor representative in the Valley was that the *family* income of the average fruit tramp was under $600 a year; whereas the family income of the stoop laborers ran under $400 a year.

As to the living conditions of both the fruit tramps and the stoop labor, the Leonard-French-Lubin report is admirably frank: "This report must state that we found

filth, squalor, an entire absence of sanitation, and a crowding of human beings into totally inadequate tents or crude structures built of boards, weeds, and anything that was found at hand to give a pitiful semblance of a home at its worst. Words cannot describe some of the conditions we saw." What I saw during my brief stay in the Valley fully confirmed this statement. During the peak of the lettuce harvest men and in some cases women, although this is against the law, are worked under the frantic speed-up of the split bench system from 4 in the morning until 10 at night. Hence the demand of the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union of California for the ending of the split bench system (a combination of piece work by the packers and hourly wages for the trimmers which speeds up both) and for time and a third for all work over ten hours a day, and for the privilege of hiring a "booster" or substitute to relieve a packer or trimmer when he or she is about to drop in his tracks.

To complete the picture of this below-sea-level, sweated, overpopulated, 130-degree-Fahrenheit Eden it is only necessary to add that with the exception of the banks and individuals—including Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*—who own the land and lease it to the shipper-growers, nobody has been making any money in the Valley since 1930. The Labor Board report states that "in spite of all economies, and with wages during 1933 as low as 12½ and 15 cents per hour, the shippers point out that they have lost an average of $3,500,000 per year for the past four years." To these losses there might well be added the heavy relief bill paid by the Federal government which is in effect a subsidy of the industry; also the cost of bring-

ing water into the Valley by tank car during last year's drought (what little water there was appears to have been preëmpted by Harry Chandler to irrigate the several hundred thousand irrigated acres he owns south of the line in Mexico).

Off season lettuce is grown all the way from Florida to California. The industry has yielded huge profits in the past, but its economics are extremely fragile and also fantastically racketed. The shipper-growers have an organization—the Western Growers Protective Association—but as far as I could learn from its Secretary, Mr. C. B. Moore, its activities are restricted to fighting adverse legislation and breaking strikes. Mr. Moore stated flatly that the Association is not interested in marketing: that was left to the individual responsibility of the grower or shipper-grower. The result is a sort of chronic chaos; the price, set by commission merchants in the eastern and middle-western markets, varies from day to day. If you are a shipper-grower, you load and "roll" your cars, and then attempt to divert them while they are on the road to whatever market seems to offer the best price at the moment. Since all or most of the growers in all the producing areas are doing this, the result is that markets are frequently glutted, thousands of tons of lettuce are spoiled and dumped; other huge quantities of lettuce wither and blow away in the fields; racketeers flourish. A favorite device of the less scrupulous commission merchants is to buy a given crop of lettuce, for which the grower pays the cost of harvesting, trimming and packing. He then reports that the Kansas City market was glutted so he sent it to Chicago which was also glutted by the time it got there, so it went to Baltimore and by

that time it had spoiled. Maybe it had and maybe it hadn't. The grower loses in any case. Everybody I talked to in the Valley agreed that the small independent grower—the man who cultivates forty acres or under—practically always loses. His condition is little better than that of the fruit tramps and the stoop labor; which makes the suggested remedy of subsistence homesteads as a device for anchoring the floating labor seem highly questionable. Anyway, why pick the Imperial Valley, which gets so hot in summer that everybody moves out who possibly can?

My liberal editor did a good job, Comrade Ware, in the matter of calling attention to the stupid mistake you and Chet Moore made in jailing me. He even brought me back to Washington to testify before the House Labor Committee concerning what was wrong with the Imperial Valley. There I did my best, Comrade Ware, to multiply your headaches and those of Mr. Moore. I demanded, first, that there be a Congressional investigation of the breakdown of law and order in the Imperial Valley; second, that agricultural labor be included in the provisions of the Wagner Labor Bill then pending.

Of course, neither of these things was done. It was not in the cards that they be done, although my recommendations were just, needful, and even crucial if the administration intended to make good on its liberal make-believe with respect to labor. It did not so intend. It had already proved repeatedly that it did not so intend, so I wasn't much surprised. I was sure that if any serious attempt had been made to include agricultural labor in the provisions of the Wagner Bill, it would have been the signal for a

revolt by almost the whole Southern Democratic delegation in Congress, led probably by Senator Robinson of Arkansas. Only a few stalwart liberals like Maverick of Texas would have dared to buck that tide.

Chet Moore knows his politics, so he probably wasn't much worried by my efforts in Washington. He had already proved what he could do when he was instrumental in procuring a thoroughly shameless whitewash of the Imperial Valley labor situation signed by the Dean of the College of Agriculture of the University of California. This report, made by a special investigating committee appointed at the request of the California State Board of Agriculture, the California Farm Bureau Federation, and the Agricultural Department of the California State Chamber of Commerce, was designed to offset the unpalatably accurate and liberal report of the Leonard-Lubin committee and that of General Glassford already referred to.

You know better than I do, Comrade Ware, what is in the cards for the Imperial Valley, and for California. Not peace, certainly. Even Europe has better chance of it, it seems to me, as things are going. Certainly it is not possible to reorganize and sanitate California's agricultural economy, without reorganizing the total national economy, and that, of course, is not immediately in prospect.

Well, happy days, Comrade Ware! Give my regards to my jail-mates: the Mexicans waiting for deportation, the out-of-luck Indians, the border gambler with his fine brow, hard eyes and bitter tongue—in a decent society and with half a chance he'd have been an able, useful citizen; also the fine kid from Martha's Vineyard, a descendant of one

of its colonial governors, who had hitch-hiked across the continent looking for a job so that he could marry his girl. He was proud that he hadn't scabbed in that lettuce strike, and I hope his girl has sense enough to feel the same way about it. Maybe he and the others are out by this time; I hope so. However, the kangaroo court always needs money, so here's a couple of bucks for them—part of what the paper paid me for bawling you out. My college fraternity just dunned me for a contribution, but I think the best people whom I met in El Centro need it more. Keep your shirt on and try talking back to Chet Moore the next time he starts crowding you. He's scared too, and bluffing more than you think.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES RORTY.

HEADING HOME

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CALLIE LONG'S BOY HUEY

HUEY LONG is dead, slain by an assassin's bullet, and his "Share the Wealth" Movement is no longer a serious threat to the Roosevelt administration. When I was in New Orleans and Baton Rouge talking to some of the third-rate politicians who were fighting Long, I more than once felt my hair rising with the realization that such a dénouement was more probable than otherwise. It was the one thing needed to prove the political and social bankruptcy of the state. It came, a shot in the dark; and when the echoes subsided, Louisiana was darker, if anything, than before that shot was fired.

Neither in speech nor in written message did the assassin, a young, politically unknown medical specialist, attempt to explain or justify his act—and the fusillade of Long's bodyguard silenced him forever. That it was the outcome of a conspiracy by Long's political enemies seems probable, although this has not yet been proved. That it will be followed by the political, economic, and social regeneration of the state seems utterly unlikely.

The Long machine will struggle desperately to maintain itself. Lacking comparable leaders—Long, like Mussolini, was always quick to suppress potential rivals within his own organization—it will probably crack up. Certainly, Jim Farley's task of bringing Louisiana back into the reg-

ular Democratic fold will be greatly facilitated. If I were a Louisianan, I would remark sourly at this point, "So what?" Everything that was bad in Louisiana before Long, and perhaps a little worse because of Long, is still there. And everything that was not there before or during the Long régime—specifically an honest and developed labor movement and moderately honest and effective liberal and radical political groupings—is still absent. Under the circumstances, the best one can do is to pray that the tendency to substitute gunfire for honesty and brains doesn't plunge Louisiana again into the horrors of the post-Civil War reconstruction period.

Concerning Long himself, I find little to change in what I wrote when he was still alive.

One would have to search hard to find something kindly to say about this dead. One might take refuge in moments undeniably charming. Certainly he was a vivid, gifted, and fascinating personality. But why will it be so difficult for his biographers to write anything interesting and moving about him, whereas it would be easy to write a good volume about any one of a hundred relatively obscure artists, scientists, honest radicals, or plain citizens?

Part of the explanation is that Long never attained moral or spiritual maturity—one even doubts that he had it in him. He was pure power-politician. He said and did almost nothing that did not contribute directly or indirectly to the attainment and consolidation of his power. Power is not interesting or moving in and of itself. And when its possessor and manipulator is otherwise without human dignity, sincerity, or grace, there is little to say about him after he is dead.

Requiescat. Here is the picture of Huey Long and his state, much as I put it together in Louisiana when Huey was at the peak of his power.

In New Orleans I talked to an ancient native son of Louisiana, who put it substantially this way:

About ten years ago a Winn Parish boy—Callie Long's boy Huey, the one who always said he was going to be President some day—came to the big town and put on an act and then another act, until by now doggone if Huey ain't just about the biggest show in America.

It was indeed a continuous performance, in Washington, in New Orleans, in Baton Rouge. I stood in the lobby of the Hotel Roosevelt in New Orleans and watched the curtain rise on one of the kaleidoscopic scenes of the Huey Long drama. Suddenly the doormen stood at attention. The little groups of pink-jowled politicians interrupted their side-of-the-mouth intimacies; the carp-faced tourists stood goggle-eyed, with open mouths. Preceded and followed by his bodyguards, a swaggering, red-faced figure strode through the revolving doors and into the elevator.

The Senator from Louisiana. The Kingfish. In the big suite on the fifth floor I knew that Huey and his henchmen would be busy until long after midnight. A crisis. Roosevelt, to use the phrase of one of Huey's journalistic enemies, had "stopped playing sissy politics." The big guns of federal patronage, to be given or withheld, were being unlimbered, at the same time that a battalion of Federal income-tax investigators was sharpshooting at Huey's lieutenants. . . .

Baton Rouge, the brand-new, beautifully landscaped campus of Huey Long's personal university, where, to celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary, Huey is staging the biggest educational show on earth. Scientists, savants, social workers, hospitably intermingled with poets, Rotarians, Lions, and Glenn Frank, throng the campus. It is the big day, the reception to the Italian Ambassador. Ta-ta-ra! The cadets are marching in blue and gold, a seven-foot drum major strutting at the head of the band. As they pass the reviewing stand, where are grouped the Ambassador, the Governor, Huey, and other notables, the band plays "Giovanezza," the marching song of Mussolini's blackshirts.

The newsreel cameraman grinds furiously. A good show. "The only thing wrong with it," mutters John Gould Fletcher, standing with outthrust jaw beside me, "is that flag there. It ought to be the Confederate flag."

I stared at him. Fletcher and I, along with Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, John Peal Bishop, and others of the Fugitive-Agrarian group of Southern writers, the editors of various Southern literary magazines, and such imported notables as Ford Madox Ford, were attending the Southern Writers Conference, one of the side shows of Huey's multi-ringed educational circus.

One of the first things we outlanders learned was that the Civil War is not over yet. When Southerners speak of the last war, they mean the Civil War. These Southern writers, it seemed to me, represented what the South never quite was nearly a century ago and what they would obstinately like it to become, in spite of the fact that obviously and irreparably it has become something quite dif-

ferent. For a couple of decades since the Great War, Southern culture has been thumbing the highways of politics, sometimes deprecatingly, and again belligerently ("I Take My Stand") but always pretty much in vain.

Is it without significance that the first politician to give Southern Culture a lift was, first, the son of an up-state hillbilly, second, the quasi-Fascist dictator of the state, and, third, a candidate for the Presidency on a fake Share the Wealth program which was either Fascist or nothing?

Just what kind of a lift did Huey give Southern Culture and by what methods?

Huey spoke at the dinner to the Italian Ambassador, following the review of Louisiana State's R.O.T.C. Said Huey:

> It seems that many have questioned whether I have interfered with the operation of the University, and Dr. Smith [the President of Louisiana State] has said that I haven't. I am slandered by the President when he says that I did not interfere. I want to assert that as a matter of fact I have interfered. I interfered when they were reducing salaries all over the United States and I stepped in and prevented the reductions at L.S.U. . . . We started out when I became Governor with about $650,000 a year. The assessment of the state then was about $1,700,000,000, and the half-mill tax was yielding then about $800,000 a year, but that tax would not be giving but about $650,000 a year. . . . It is now getting about $2,700,000 a year. I interfered and gave them some more money. I am going to quit this interference at the first opportunity and give the job to Dr. Smith and let him and the others stay up nights with legislators, getting the additional votes necessary to put the legislation over.

We are celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the University. I have had considerable to do with only the last five years and I am going to give some advice to the colleges. . . . You will find that you cannot do without politicians. They are a necessary evil in this day and time. You may not like getting money from one source and spending it for another. But the thing for the school people to do is that if the politicians are going to steal make them steal for the schools.

Note the rigorous logic of the Senator's point of view. Public education is a matter of using political means to direct public money into educational channels. Politics is larceny. The job of the educators is to aid and abet political larceny.

Interestingly enough, the visiting educators rather admired Huey's bold and forthright tactics. They even enjoyed the characteristic sadism with which Huey rubbed the noses of the servants of culture into the brutal realities of spoils politics. They liked Huey better than Glenn Frank, who came and went the evening before, giving us his familiar version of the "Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze." Mr. Frank started in by approving as practical and necessary the coördination of education with the state power; he concluded by making equally fierce faces, first at the politicians who dared to infringe upon the integrity and freedom of educators and second at educators who were so recreant to the trust reposed in them by the state as to "propagandize" their classes, instead of jumping them through the conventional hoops of "objectivity."

Clearly, the Senator from Louisiana had no monopoly of demagoguery. But I was struck by the relatively su-

perior astuteness and logic of Huey's performance. What he said about Louisiana State University was approximately true. But what the Senator did not say is also true: that Louisiana's educational picture as a whole is dark and growing darker. Free schoolbooks, yes. But during the Long régime the salaries of teachers in the elementary and secondary schools were repeatedly cut. The average for white teachers in the elementary schools last year was $621.95; for Negro teachers $218.97—both figures representing substantial reductions from the preceding year. Moreover, unpaid salaries amounted to a million and a quarter, double the total outstanding the year before.

Why did Louisiana State University occupy its preferred position? Because it was not only a good showpiece but a useful instrument for fascist "coördination" of the middle class. Ninety per cent of the L.S.U. students were for Long—they had better be if they expected to get the jobs which are liberally distributed to right-minded students. Moreover, the more energetic and loyal of these students were encouraged to take graduate work in other universities and there start Share the Wealth clubs.

According to the officials of Louisiana State, some of whom profess strong liberal views, they and their teachers enjoy untrammeled academic freedom. Did not George Counts, of Columbia, make the principal address on the occasion when L.S.U. awarded honorary degrees to the Italian Ambassador and others? He did, and it was an excellent, forthright, radical speech, lacking only specific mention of Huey Long, what he had done to the State of Louisiana, and what he proposed to do to the nation. The public utterances and writings of the teachers in

L.S.U.'s social-science department exhibit similar discreet omissions.

As with education, so with Huey's sham battles with big business and his sham support of labor. As clearly shown by Oliver Carlson in his series in the *New York Post,* Huey's theory and practice were severely practical with respect to both issues. "Socking big business" made excellent political capital for his début. But, points out Carlson:

> in Shreveport he at one and the same time secured a small reduction in the electric-light rate and allowed a 38 per cent increase in the gas rate. The same company, Southwestern Gas and Electric Company, operated both services and lost nothing by the deal. Moreover, Southwestern Gas and Electric contributed not less than $10,000 to Huey's campaign expenses in the 1924 gubernatorial contest, according to Long's own campaign manager.

Undoubtedly Huey's initial tub thumping caused perturbation in the breasts of the Louisiana magnates, but business is quick to recognize a practical man in politics. Otherwise, why were Carlson, Carleton Beals, and I unable to induce a single representative of big business to make a forthright attack upon Long?

I did induce one corporation lawyer, a well-known and irreconcilable enemy of Long, to talk a little but strictly not for quotation. What has happened, he said, is that today New Orleans business is largely owned by holding companies or large industrial corporations with headquarters in New York or Chicago; this trend toward absentee ownership has been accelerated during the depression.

Hence, many of the important executives are not native owner-managers but satraps sent down from the North to manage a unit of a national or international enterprise. In the old days, the native business men would buy political insurance by contributing to the campaign funds of relatively honest candidates. Today, the imported satraps are more likely to negotiate an offensive political maneuver: they pay for the election of a crook and bargain for specific advantages.

Some time back, when a delegation of union leaders asked Huey to require his road contractors to pay the prevailing scale of wages, he replied angrily: "You fellows should be glad to get a job at any wage and of any kind, without bothering about wage scales."

This is the logic of capitalism in its present period of decline. It is the logic of fascism, of which Huey was almost the only definitive and formidable exponent in America. His showmanship, his back-of-the-scenes trading with the satraps of big business, his ruthless purchase and coercion of votes—all are understandable in the terms of this logic.

Yet, put it all together, and it does not constitute a true or sufficient explanation of Huey Long and his following. A formidable fascist movement cannot be organized and led by a super-robot demagogue who functions merely as a logical cog in an evolving politico-economic mechanism. The Senator from Louisiana was not pure charlatan—the ablest charlatans are never pure, and they always express something beside themselves and their personal wills to power. Mussolini, in the period of his struggle for

power, had the support of Italian finance and industry, who saw in him the instrument of their salvation; but his appeal was to the national memory—a drive to rehabilitate the grandeur that was Rome. Hitler had the support of Thyssen and others; but his appeal was to the hatred and resentment of a conquered and humiliated people—his slogan the repudiation of the War guilt and of the Treaty of Versailles.

Huey Long had the support of an influential section of Louisiana business (Oliver Carlson estimated that 50 per cent of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce were for him), but his appeal was to the century-old hatred of the Southern hillbillies for the plantation owners and for the new hierarchy of big business centering in New Orleans. To them and to the middle classes of the cities and towns, Huey posed the rhetorical question: "Little man, what now?" and then answered for them: "Every man a king!"

South of Baton Rouge in the not-so-idyllic "Evangeline country" I found the Cajun trappers fighting fitfully to establish a union that would give them some protection against the extortion of the landowners and the fur traders —among the chief of whom was one of Huey's principal political lieutenants. Then, circling north through the rice plantations—on one of which, owned by a Long supporter, Huey arranged to have convict labor employed, despite the state law specifically prohibiting it—I came at last to the Free State of Winn, otherwise known as Winnfield Parish, where Huey Long was born and where his eighty-three-year-old father still lives.

He dwells on the edge of the town of Winnfield, county seat of Winn Parish, in a new, single-story bungalow at the end of a lane, about a hundred yards from the site of the log cabin in which Huey was born. He and Huey's brother, Earl, received me cordially and invited me to share their supper of cheese, crackers, and beer.

It was scarcely an interview. Huey Long, Sr., had something to say, not for his son but for himself—a simple, violent person, still violent at eighty-three, the big-boned, six-foot frame erect and powerful, the voice roaring. This is what he said:

"Didn't Abraham Lincoln free the niggers and not give the planters a dime? Why shouldn't Huey take the money away from the rich and still leave 'em plenty? Abe Lincoln freed the niggers without price. Why shouldn't the white slaves be freed, and their masters left all they can use?"

He paused. "Maybe you're surprised to hear talk like that. Well, it was just such talk that my boy was raised under and that I was raised under. My father and my mother favored the Union. Why not? They didn't have slaves. They didn't even have decent land. The rich folks had all the good land and all the slaves—why, their women didn't even comb their own hair. They'd sooner speak to a nigger than to a poor white. They tried to pass a law saying that only them as owned land could vote. And, when the war come, the man that owned ten slaves didn't have to fight."

The dropped mouth of the old man writhed, contorted, spat out this ancient, still-vivid hatred. Suddenly he collapsed in his chair.

"There wants to be a revolution, I tell you. I seen this

domination of capital, seen it for seventy years. What do these rich folks care for the poor man? They care nothing —not for his pain, his sickness, nor his death. And now they're talking again about keeping the poor folks from voting—that same talk. I say there wants to be a revolution."

The effort had exhausted him. "Son, I'm an old man," he rumbled. "But I'm not too old. I know what I'm sayin'. . . . Take this down, son. Whatever I say is said conscientious. I hope what Huey says is conscientious and I kind of think it is."

The old man dozed in his chair. Earl Long and I munched crackers and drank beer. Would Huey run for the presidency in 1936? I asked. Earl thought he would.

A little later I unlatched the gate of Huey Long, Sr.'s, cow pasture and walked down the lane. I had found what I was looking for—the sociological springboard of Huey's rise to fame and power. As with Mussolini and Hitler, it was a war. But not the Great War. Just as my Southern friends had been telling me, it was the Civil War.

Twenty miles back in the hills from Winnfield is the village of Sikes: a filling station, two stores, an ancient, unused hotel, sagging on its foundations, a one-room shack that serves as office for the village doctor. All the old and middle-aged people in and around Sikes knew Huey; some of them are kin to the Longs, who once owned a hundred-sixty-acre farm in the vicinity. Huey and his brother Earl worked this farm: their father would take them out of school to help make a corn crop.

Most of the corn and cotton farmers owned their own land then. Today the lumber and paper companies and

the banks own 85 per cent of it; of the remaining 15 per cent, perhaps one tenth is free from mortgages. Until comparatively recent years, these hills were heavily forested with pine. The farmers would clear an acre or two, cultivate it as long as it remained fertile, then let it go for taxes. In the early days, the forest was the foe of the homesteader; the timber was considered valueless, and lumber companies acquired big tracts for a pittance.

The hill farmers were poor then, and life was primitive. The village doctor, who is now sixty-one, told me that he was fourteen years old before he saw a mule: it was oxen then that dragged the homemade carts, loaded with a few bales of cotton, over unspeakable roads to the nearest shipping point.

The hill farmers are poorer than ever now: they have lost their land and most of them are either renters or share-croppers. And, since erosion—a natural process which Secretary of Agriculture Hyde once described as the "friction of the mortgage on the farmer's pocketbook"—has carried most of the top-soil down the river, the hill farms produce less than half as much cotton to the acre as the good land of the Yazoo Delta. The hill farmers are poor: no paint on the two- and three-room shacks; often no steps on which to mount the sagging porch; no radio; soapboxes instead of chairs; corn pone and fat meat to eat—yes, and potlikker, of course. And most of them were for Huey Long, regardless.

Regardless of what?

Regardless of the fact that Winnfield Parish—the Free State of Winn, during the Civil War—has been for nearly a hundred years one of the most radical spots on the

whole map of the South. Regardless of the fact that many of the ex-Populists and ex-socialists who voted for Huey were privately skeptical of his sincerity and of the cogency of his Share the Wealth program. They were skeptical but, like Huey's own father, they hoped or "kind of thought" that he was conscientious.

History books are deplorably lacking in significant minutiæ. Most of those I consulted had nothing to say about Winn Parish. But the memories of the old-timers are extraordinarily fresh: they check with each other; and I am confident that the following sketch is substantially accurate.

When the Civil War broke out, Winn Parish sent a delegate, David Pierson, to the convention called to organize the Confederacy. He was instructed to vote *against* secession; he *did* vote against secession; and, thereafter, although the power of the planters swept Louisiana into the Confederacy, Winnfield Parish was popularly referred to as the *Free State* of Winn.

What did they want, these abolitionist, antisecessionist, Unionist yeoman farmers of the Free State of Winn? In the words of Huey Long's own father, they wanted to "get the niggers off our necks." There were few Negroes in Winn Parish then and there are few Negroes now. But there were Negro slaves in the delta lands of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, whence these poor whites emigrated, and it was the competition of slave labor that forced them back into the hills. There are Negroes, hundreds of thousands of them, in the Yazoo Delta today, working as share-croppers under conditions which are the practical equivalent of slavery and forcing out the white share-croppers.

When I drove through the Delta, the poor whites I picked up along the road told me: "It's hard for a white man to get a home these days. The owners would rather have the niggers."

Perhaps the ultimate working out of this conflict is expressed in the attempt of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, in Arkansas and elsewhere, to organize white and black share-croppers together. To "get the niggers off their backs," the white share-croppers are obliged to make common cause with the Negro share-croppers on terms of economic equality, which means ultimately, of course, social equality.

Both before and after the Civil War, the hill farmers of Winn Parish proposed a different solution. They wanted the Negroes colonized on reservations, like the Indians. But the story of this struggle can best be told in the words of the octogenarians who lived through most of it. To them the past is ever present in the contemporary conflicts; there is no break in the historical continuity; they are still fighting, and never so blindly as today.

There is a side road out of Sikes that leads for ten miles through cutover country, becoming progressively worse. When it became totally impassable, I left my car and followed a rough wagon trail nearly a mile through the ragged second growth of birch and oak. At the end of the trail was a three-room cabin, and in the cabin a bright-eyed ancient of ninety-one, sitting bent over his fireplace. His whiskers were white and Jovian, but his hair, like that of his eighty-seven-year-old brother, Uncle Percy Smith, whom I had seen in Sikes, showed scarcely a trace

of gray. These two were the wheel horses of the Socialist Party in Winn Parish, which in 1908, when Eugene Debs spoke in Winnfield, elected better than half the Parish officials. I wanted the old man to talk about Huey, but J. P. Smith was not a Long man, although Huey's grandmother was his first cousin.

"I'm a dyed-in-the-wool socialist. But we can't put it in soon enough to save the nation. Share the Wealth won't do enough soon enough. We're done. There's been a war after every big panic except one. I don't believe it will make much difference whether we elect a Democrat or a Republican president. We'll go into a war anyway, right after the next presidential election. Son, you say you've been around over the country. Don't you agree with me?"

I admitted a similar apprehension, while, as became my youth, I evaded the responsibilities of the prophet. The old man pondered and poked his meager fire. When he spoke again, it was the older memories, the ancient hatreds that flared in him.

"They call it the Civil War. I call it the most degradingest thing that ever happened to a nation. When they came to conscript us, my brother, J. W. Smith, said to me: 'I'll lie in the woods till the moss grows over my back before I fight for the other man's niggers.' "

I had heard the phrase before from other ancients. If their memories are accurate, about half the able-bodied males of Winn Parish "took refuge in the arms of General Green" rather than fight in the Confederate army. In other words, they took to the woods, where the Confederate cavalry hunted them and shot them down like wild shote.

Some of them, like J. W. Smith, who was killed at Vicksburg, enlisted in the Union army.

After the War, Winn Parish joined with the Southern planters to throw out the carpetbaggers. But again they were tricked and baffled. The Negroes weren't colonized like the Indians—the planters still held the whip hand. So, twenty years later, when Charles Vincent organized Winn Parish for the Populists, the old slogan was still to the fore: "Get the niggers off our necks." In 1892 or thereabouts, Winn Parish elected a full Populist ticket. Gradually this tide receded; but about ten years later the Socialist Party elected nearly half the police jurors and schoolboard members for Winn Parish.

Where was the Long family in this history? I collected various legends, none of them scandalous or even discreditable, although the Senator made no use of them in his autobiography, *Every Man a King*.

So far as I could make out, the talent and force of the Long family—it is genuine; all of Huey's five brothers and sisters are clever and more or less successful people—are derived chiefly from the female side.

Huey's grandmother, the mother of Huey Long, Sr., was a Lee, whose people came to Winnfield Parish from Virginia in 1836. The old-timers remember her as a "very determined woman." It seems that her husband, John Long, who was, incidentally, a Unionist, shared the liking of many another leading citizen for gambling and liquor. But Mary Long was the leading woman Baptist of Winnfield. She led the fight to vote liquor out of Winnfield Parish and won it by a spectacular and well-remembered

campaign which included parading the town, waving a bloody bridle. The blood, she declaimed, was from her husband's hands, cut while he was drunk. In the words of one of the old-timers, "That old lady and her gang whooped and hollered at the polls until a man could scarcely think, let alone vote right." John Long seems to have been philosophic. After the election he is reported to have commented admiringly: "Doggone if Mary ain't beat me out of my liquor."

But it is concerning the Senator's mother, Caledonia Tyson Long, that the people of the Parish speak with unqualified admiration. "A bright woman," they say, "a noble woman, very religious and very ambitious for her children." Many is the time they saw her driving Huey to school at the end of a peach-tree sprout.

Huey was a smart and enterprising boy—it is true, as recounted in his autobiography, that twice in his early 'teens he ran away from home. Was he a leader of the boys? Yes, in a way. "If Huey couldn't pitch, he wouldn't play." A braggart, it appears, but not good in a fight. "Huey would always run like a turkey." All over Louisiana I heard that phrase. But in Winn Parish, used to describe Huey's behavior as a boy, it acquired a special significance. Perhaps it was true, I reflected, that Huey's well-known aversion to physical combat had an early and more or less neurotic basis.

The office of the country doctor was empty. On the wall I saw the diploma of an excellent medical college; near it was a scroll of neatly engraved verses:

I stick to those who stick to me,
All others need not bother me.
Altho of patients I've no lack
It takes the cash to run this shack.
If I'm to be your doctor still
You must keep paid up on your bill.

Perhaps because of the failure of his patients to observe this injunction, I found the doctor putting in a corn crop. After some persuasion, he consented to talk to me. Did he know the Longs? Yes, he was born in Winnfield Parish, and had practiced there for forty years. Was he for Huey?

The doctor said, "Whoa," to his mule, spat, and regarded me somberly. "Son," he said, "did you ever take a good look at Huey? Did you ever even take a good look at a mule? A mule with a Roman nose is no good; any farmer with any sense knows he's no good. He's just high-strung and he'll never be any good."

With which homespun preliminary, this country doctor, who had lived and worked wholly outside the currents of modern psychiatry and psychoanalysis as practiced in the great cities, proceeded to give me a cogent and rather convincing analysis of Huey's physical and psychological characteristics, including detailed comparisons with Hitler and Mussolini. A twisted psychological type, he thought, with a power fixation dating from boyhood—even then he always insisted he would be President some day. Physical cowardice balanced by malice and vindictiveness. A volcanic flow of neurotic energy—but he might blow up at any minute.

I quoted the judgment of a Southern man of letters—a

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I quoted the judgment of a Southern man of letters—a

Catholic—whom I had interviewed in New Orleans: "He has all the attributes of the mind of Satan—anger, pride, malice, vengefulness, lust."

The doctor snorted and brushed the ecclesiastical adjectives aside. Callie Long was a fine woman, but Callie Long's boy Huey was just a bad animal hopelessly off center and not to be trusted. With which the doctor bade me good day and returned to his plowing.

A few miles out of Sikes I passed Mineral Springs, where, in the Baptist Church and schoolhouse, Huey Long had debated socialism with Uncle Percy Smith, J. P. Lucas, and Little John Peters. Huey was in his 'teens then but already an aspiring orator. He took the democratic side of the debate, being teamed with Harley B. Bozeman, later one of his chief political opponents in Winnfield Parish. Huey lost that debate—the crowd was all for socialism. Now, however, the hill farmers were swinging to Huey. The towns too.

In Winnfield one of the leading lawyers assured me that Huey would win the next primaries by a hundred-thousand majority. He was a Long man now. He hadn't always been. He had competed with Huey when the latter first started practicing law in Winnfield. Within two years Huey had grabbed the lion's share of the business away from the veterans. No, Huey hadn't been ethical. He hadn't waited for business to come to him. He had gone out and hustled for it. But you had to hand it to him. Everything they said was impossible Huey had done. Louisiana had never before produced a politician who could touch him.

Driving north into the Yazoo Delta, I tried to put to-

gether what I had learned about Callie Long's boy Huey. Unquestionably the lawyer was right: he was the ablest, the most formidable politician the South has produced since the Civil War—also the most ruthless. The doctor, I felt, was also right. Fragments of Huey's speeches occurred to me. What had he said when, after some minor political victory, his vanquished and chastened opponent sat on the platform with him? "There sits B——. I bought him the way you buy a sack of potatoes." If that isn't sadism, what is?

Again: "It is not true that I coerced Shreveport into accepting free schoolbooks and an airport. I stomped 'em into it."

What an ironic consummation—that the authentic, century-old revolt of the Southern hill farmers, first abolitionist, then Populist, then socialist, should spawn this neurotically galvanized superpolitician, this frail-ferocious potential dictator of the United States!

Yet how logical, how almost inevitable, after all. As Hamilton Basso has shown, Huey Long was not the first of his kind to arise in the South; he was merely the most forceful, the most imaginative, the most daring, the ablest. The tools to him who can use them.

Who can say, contemplating the career of Huey Long, that he did not prove himself adept at manipulating the materials of the current economic and political situation? The crowd, the vast American crowd, with its literate moronism, its simple faiths, its primitive greeds, its latent fears and hatreds, its worship of success, of the thing done, no matter what or how; the dilemma of big business, facing the accelerating anarchic chaos of its obsolete institu-

tions, legalities, and processes—needing more and more urgently someone to pour the strong liquor of demagoguery that will keep the crowd still hoping but still fooled and frustrated.

These were the times and these were the needs that bred Huey P. Long, Jr., born with hatred in his bones and spurred by the fear which is hatred's other face; Huey Long, the man of many voices, the lawyer among lawyers, the hillbilly among hillbillies, the business man among business men, above all, the politician among politicians, wanting power as a normal man wants bread or sex, brutal in victory, crafty and dangerous in defeat.

Huey Long is dead. Of him it might be said that he introduced a new kind of demagogy and occasioned a new type of assassination in American politics. Both are ominous portents. The society is over-ripe and the New Deal has done nothing to arrest its decay. Effects follow causes. Huey will have imitators, successors, in Louisiana and in the nation.

30

ALL QUIET ON THE SOUTHERN FRONT

IN Poinsett County, Arkansas, I encountered another sheriff, A. C. Dubard. He was courteous and mild-spoken, and he did not arrest me, perhaps because I stayed only about seven hours in the county. Everything was quiet in Poinsett County, Sheriff Dubard assured me; if only everybody, especially newspapermen, would say that everything was quiet, everything would be quiet, he was sure.

As a matter of fact, at that particular moment, everything was quiet. The cotton share-croppers, both white and Negro, were quietly continuing to organize, in spite of the fact that the active members of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union were quietly being kicked off the land; most of the leaders were already exiled in Memphis, where I had talked to them. The others were quietly being told to leave, so they said, on pain of sudden death. They told me that things were also pretty quiet in the adjoining county of Mississippi, where W. B. Webb, one of the union organizers, was sitting quietly in his cabin waiting for a visit from the night-riders. The share-croppers are indescribably poor, and Mr. Webb had only one shell for his shot-gun. But he was quietly expecting to be obliged to use it. Quietly, and without much comment, the union organizers had shown me a mimeographed statement de-

tailing some twenty-three acts of "tyranny and terror" committed against men, women and children of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union during the preceding six months.

After leaving Sheriff Dubard, I stopped along the road to talk to two leaders of one of the white locals of the union. It was a typical share-cropper's cabin; three rooms, a sagging porch, a hard-baked, shrubless, flowerless yard; back of the house, men and mules were plowing a square mile of flat cotton land, recently stumped, and highly productive.

Yes, the local was still meeting, they said, at a gin house down the road. Weren't they afraid of being shot up by night-riders? (After one such raid, 130 bullet holes were counted in the house of one of the union leaders.) No, they weren't afraid; they were going to hold a meeting the following night. Didn't they expect to be raided?

One looked at the other. " 'Tain't likely," he said. Then, seeing my skepticism, he added quietly: "We got guns."

In Marked Tree, C. T. Carpenter, the local attorney for the union, was sitting quietly in his office, having let it be known that if the recent visit of armed night-riders to his home were repeated, he too would be armed and prepared to defend himself.

Mr. Carpenter is a former minister of the Gospel, and has taught a men's Bible class in Marked Tree for twenty years. He is also a patriotic Southern Democrat.

"I am a son of one of the men who stood with Robert E. Lee at the surrender," said Mr. Carpenter. "I have always voted the Democratic ticket, and was an enthusiastic sup-

porter of Franklin D. Roosevelt both before and after the nominating convention."

Mr. Carpenter seemed to think that all that helped. But he too had a gun.

I didn't have a gun, and by that time the prevailing quiet was beginning to get on my nerves. I had only my newspaper credentials and when I presented these to the district attorney and to A. C. Spillings, manager for the Chapman-Dewey plantation, whom I found in conference, the atmosphere became distinctly chilly.

Both declined at first to be interviewed, on the ground that their experiences with Northern newspapermen had been unfortunate. At the moment the series on the Arkansas share-croppers by F. Raymond Daniell was appearing in the *New York Times*. District Attorney Stafford asserted that he would be glad to pay Mr. Daniell's expenses back to Marked Tree so that he might have the opportunity to call him a liar.

After some persuasion Mr. Spillings consented to go over the Daniell articles with me so that I might ascertain the ground of their objection. As far as I could make out, the real objection was that Daniell had not only reported the planters' statements accurately and in great detail, but had also given space to statements made by officials of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. In fact the only thing that Mr. Spillings specifically denied was that he, Spillings, had said he would vote for acquittal if he were on a jury trying somebody for killing an "outside agitator."

My last interview in Poinsett County was with the Reverend J. Abner Sage, pastor of the Methodist church of Marked Tree, whom the union leaders had charged with

helping to organize the night-riding of which their members had been victims. Brother Sage also honored Mr. Daniell by calling him a liar. I intimated that since he had spiritual charge over that community, he must be distressed and concerned by the violence of recent events.

"I am not aware of any acts of violence," said Brother Sage. Being further pressed, he admitted that there had been violence, but insisted that everything was quiet now. Everything would have been quiet, except for the intervention of Northern agitators.

Brother Sage did not take kindly to questioning. In the end, this quiet, austere man of God intimated that if any more Bolshevik newspapermen like Mr. Daniell and me stuck our noses into the Arkansas share-cropper situation, there wouldn't be any more quiet, but instead, plenty of trouble. Furthermore, if I wanted trouble right now, I could have it.

After that, I left without much delay, reflecting that a war correspondent's job is easier, and on the whole, less hazardous than that of reporting certain sectors of peaceful America, both at that moment and in any future that I could foresee.

A few weeks later I was in Washington, prepared to tell any interested New Deal Gideonites how the war was going in Poinsett County. But things were pretty quiet around the government offices. The report of Mrs. Mary Connor Myers of the AAA legal staff, who spent three weeks investigating conditions in eastern Arkansas, had been suppressed, although it is known that her findings substantiated the charges of the union that hundreds of

share-croppers had been illegally evicted and cheated out of their rightful share in the cotton acreage-reduction contracts. On top of this Chester Davis had purged the legal staff of the AAA by discharging Jerome Frank and others; and in a new ruling Secretary Wallace had capitulated to the Southern planters. Clearly, the share-croppers were out of luck, in Washington as in Poinsett County.

In the *Nation* for Sept. 18, 1935, H. L. Mitchell and J. R. Butler completed this picture of the idyllic relations of Poinsett County's incorporated Ole Massas and their faithful croppers as follows:

> By now the offensive against us (the Southern Tenant Farmers Union) develops new forms. In recent weeks there has appeared a new organization, ostensibly of working farmers, whose members wear green shirts, have a military discipline, and flaunt as their sacred emblem—the swastika! Hitler over the plantations!
>
> We are now working for more adequate wages in cotton picking. Refusing any longer to accept wages of 35 cents to 65 cents a hundred pounds, our membership has voted . . . to strike for $1.00 a hundred. As this strike starts, terror will again close down on the countryside.

How real that terror is I had reason to know. But in Memphis I saw a queer-looking contraption of spindles and belts which seemed potentially even more terrifying. I talked to its inventors, the Rust brothers; also to experts at the Delta Experiment Station and elsewhere. They confirmed, practically without qualification, the claims of the inventors. One of them said: "If labor conditions were what they were before the depression (around $1.25 a day

for field labor) most of the Delta planters would be using mechanical cotton-pickers now."

With the present hand-picking method, the average cost of harvesting the American cotton crop is $13 per bale. It is estimated that when the Rust machine or its equivalent is generally introduced, the average cost will be about one-fifth of the *present* cost of hand-picking (from 35 cents to 65 cents a hundred pounds). Moreover, the mechanization of harvesting, which is the bottle neck of the industry, would precipitate the mechanization of cotton production as a whole. Bulletin No. 290 of the Delta Experiment Station says:

> Much more labor than is needed for cotton production has been kept on most Delta plantations, primarily for the picking season. Efforts to reduce production labor have been both feeble and futile, for the reason that the peak load comes at picking time. Before production costs can be reduced to the minimum the harvest problems must be solved. . . .
>
> When mechanical picking is made possible, hand labor may be reduced to a minimum through the use of labor-saving machinery in all production operations. Planters will be able to reduce their labor population at least 75 per cent.

With mechanization, the experts assured me, the Yazoo Delta could compete successfully in the world market with any area now in production or in prospect. Without mechanization, with the acreage cut down and the price of cotton pegged at 12 cents by government financing totaling $600,000,000 in March, 1935, production was shifting to Brazil and the Argentine. There cotton is picked at 34 cents a hundred and labor is "docile."

In the *Saturday Evening Post* of Sept. 17, 1935, James E. Edmonds estimates that by 1940 Brazil alone will be exporting about 4,000,000 bales of cotton "just as good and more cheaply produced," which will reduce the market of North American cotton growers by that much. He adds the following macabre reflection:

> Four million bales of export loss in five years means the equivalent of about 400,000 cotton-producing families deprived of livelihood, cut off as customers for the goods and products of the rest of the United States, cast back upon bare subsistence farming in a condition of pioneer primitive existence, or thrown into competition with the producers of food and foodstuffs in other sections. Actually it would mean that the more than 2,000,000 families which produce cotton in the North American South would lose from one quarter to one third of their normal income.

The experts say that the only way the South can meet this threat is by mechanization. In his letter endorsing the Rust cotton-picker, W. E. Ayres, assistant director of the Delta Experiment Station, writes: "Lincoln emancipated the Southern Negro. It remains for cotton harvesting machinery to emancipate the Southern cotton planter."

There is hope, then, for the modern, incorporated Ole Massas of the plantations. But what about the "emancipated" plantation share-croppers and laborers both black and white? Mr. Ayres has his answer to this:

> Notwithstanding the objections that some have raised to such a machine because of present unemployment, I have maintained for ten years that it isn't up to agriculture or to

cotton producers, as a class of agricultural people, to absorb at starvation wages machine-replaced industrial labor. Printers, ginners, textile manufacturers, and other industrialists are just as much obligated to throw their labor-saving devices into the back alley in behalf of unemployment as the cotton producer.

In a recent talk before agricultural engineers at Memphis, I made the statement that it would be very much more satisfactory to remove the lint from the seed or do our ginning by hand for the reason that it could be done indoors, and that the production would not deteriorate while waiting to be hand-picked.

It would take far too much space to discuss the implications of this statement or to speculate on how the introduction of the cotton-picker will affect the "quiet" of eastern Arkansas (a dozen Marked Tree planters have signed endorsements of the Rust machine) or of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. By the admission of one of the foremost experts of the cotton-producing region, labor is at present getting starvation wages; South American encroachment on the market will further reduce acreage, employment, and wages. If to meet this competition, the picking of cotton is mechanized, the labor population would be reduced by at least 75 per cent. How, by starving the croppers and laborers to death? Obviously, under the capitalist mode of production, the dice are loaded against labor in either case.

Secretary Wallace is a mystic. Doubtless the crystal ball of the New Deal will reveal an answer, utterly satisfying, and "constitutional."

31

TVA: THE PRESIDENT'S LOVE CHILD

"I STATE to you categorically that as a broad general rule the development of public utilities should remain, with certain exceptions, a function of private initiative and private capital."

Franklin D. Roosevelt said this in an election speech in Portland, Oregon, in September, 1932. He added some qualifying words about the necessity of retaining hydroelectric resources in public hands and "giving the people the right to operate their own power business where and when it is essential to protect them against inefficient service or exorbitant charges"—the yardstick idea.

Six months after making this speech, the President and his Brain Trust were busy serving up the mixed dishes of sour pickles that the New Deal turned out to be. One of these dishes was the Tennessee Valley Authority and in the beginning, at least, it was his favorite of all the children bred out of Harvard, the University of Chicago and other brain centers by the President's somewhat irresponsible economic experimentalism.

Even in its original conception, TVA didn't jibe with Mr. Roosevelt's unexciting liberalism, as expressed in the statement quoted above. And three years later the child was squalling in the Tennessee wilderness, beset by a score of injunctions, harried by the Edison Institute, the Ap-

palachian Coal Association, and the Liberty League, and trying earnestly, in court and in Congress, to resemble itself as little as possible so that the President wouldn't repudiate the consequences of his gentlemanly philandering with the facts of life, as more forthright people understand them.

I was in Knoxville, Tennessee, when the local Chamber of Commerce was in the act of adopting the child with a touching maternal ardor. "TVA Appreciation Week" was being celebrated with a parade of floats, bands, and a big barbecue. Over thirty cities and towns participated in this tribute, in which chambers of commerce, labor unions, and farmers' organizations united in testifying that TVA has meant much to the seven states affected by its ramified program of navigation improvement, flood and erosion control, electrification, reforestation and economic rehabilitation.

At the preliminary love feast held to lay plans for this celebration there were only two vacant chairs. The private power companies and the coal companies were not represented, but neither did they disturb the somewhat ironical amenities of the occasion by any forthright opposition to Appreciation Week. Being hopelessly corrupted by the virus of economic determinism, I was not surprised by the benign unanimity with which Rotarians, labor union leaders, and chambers of commerce were cheering for TVA. It was induced, one suspected, both by the prospect of cheaper electric rates if and when TVA hurdles the legal obstructions by which it is confronted, and by the utterly incontrovertible gospel that $48,000,000 can't be wrong—that being the amount which TVA had spent in

the area since inception. Knoxville has enjoyed a substantial share of this expenditure, which has flowed into even the smallest capillaries of the regional economy, with particular benefit, however, to the local real estate and mercantile interests.

In addressing the conference of mayors called to lay plans for Appreciation Week, Mayor J. F. O'Connor of Knoxville summarized the basis of the city's gratitude when he said: "Frankly, Knoxville would have been in a bad way but for TVA. Through its help we are now well on our way out of the depression."

Some 350 cities and towns in the seven states affected by the development have applied for TVA power. With the exception of Birmingham, Alabama, all the major municipalities where the issue has been presented to the people have voted to bring in TVA power. Two years ago, Knoxville passed a bond issue for the construction of a municipal distributive system. TVA won in Memphis by a vote of 17 to 1; Chattanooga passed its bond issue by a vote of 2 to 1, in a bitterly contested election which developed some amusing episodes.

Candles burned in the offices of the election commissioners when they counted the ballots that authorized Chattanooga to build its own distributing system using TVA power. Why candles, when the offices were also lighted electrically? Because the labor unionists in the Tennessee Valley are a bit cynical about the private power interests. They bought and lighted the candles because they feared the electric power might be cut off just when the ballots were being counted; and they didn't trust what

the Moseses of the private power interests would do if the lights went out.

As it happened, the lights didn't go out. The Tennessee Electric Power Company even went so far as virtuously to supply gas lamps for just such an emergency.

Negroes voted in that election, and the opposition to the private power company was gross enough to intimate that some of the $24,000 spent by the Citizens' and Taxpayers' League, political ally of the power interests, went to those Negroes. A grand jury investigated this expenditure and found that $20,000 of it came from a source outside the state. From the Commonwealth and Southern Utility Holding Company, of which Tennessee Electric Power is a subsidiary? The opposition newspapers intimated as much. In any case, the Negroes possibly reasoned that there were no jobs in sight even if they did vote against the bond issue, whereas cheap lighting would be in prospect if they voted for it. By a pure coincidence, it is reported that the local Negro boss lost his job shortly after the election.

One of the colored people who voted for TVA power was Georgia, cook in the family of Adolph S. Ochs, publisher of the *Chattanooga Times,* and ardent supporter of the private power interests. When Georgia announced her intention, Mr. Ochs was terribly hurt. He circulated a six-page letter to hundreds of his friends, pointing out that Georgia's vote would cancel his—obviously a sheer outrage; also other colored cooks might be laughing darkly and plotting similar disloyalty. The letter was printed. It proved to be a political boomerang. Georgia became a popular heroine and was offered scores of jobs in case it

happened she should be asked to leave the service of Mr. Ochs, which for understandable reasons didn't happen.

It may be gathered from these incidents, first, that Southern politics is both humorous and rowdy, and second, that for the past two years the fight of the Valley people to use the power which the Federal government is putting at their disposal has been in the foreground of politics. Both things are true; it is also true that labor, for excellent reasons, has played a leading rôle in this fight.

Before the NRA codes went into effect, furniture factories in the Valley were paying as low as 4½ cents an hour for a 65-hour week. But TVA started operations almost simultaneously with NRA, and TVA has meant far more to labor in the Valley than NRA meant during its brief and ineffectual span. The wage scale paid during the depression on Norris Dam is roughly two or three times as high as that paid by private power utilities and private contractors to labor used on dams built for the most part during the New Era. TVA labor in the Knoxville area is paid from 45 cents an hour for common labor to $1.50 an hour for cable-way operators, and similar scales prevail on other TVA projects. In March the total personnel of TVA was 13,495 and the total pay roll was $1,283,052.

Inevitably, this expenditure made a considerable impact upon the labor situation in the Valley, where the prevailing wage last spring ran from 30 cents an hour for common labor in Knoxville to 15 cents and less in areas remote from the TVA influences. Moreover, the TVA labor policy, as directed by Clair C. Killen, formerly international representative for the International Brotherhood

of Electrical Workers, has consistently favored unionization, directly with respect to TVA workers and indirectly with respect to the effect of this policy on the activities of union organizers in the Valley.

TVA labor is organized in a Works Council, which is not a company union, but a vertical structure made up of horizontal segments of existing craft unions. The TVA labor relations director is not a member of this council, which is run by committees of workers.

There is impressive evidence that this liberal labor policy has been notably successful from the purely practical point of view of getting the job done. On private construction jobs the average labor turnover is 25 per cent a month. For TVA labor it has dropped to one-half of 1 per cent a month.

This striking gain in continuity of employment has undoubtedly contributed to the efficiency with which the Dam construction has gone forward. Norris Dam will be completed in two and a half years as against the army's original estimate of four years. Ross White, superintendent of construction, told me that the efficiency of the Tennessee mountaineer and "poor white" labor employed on the Dam, much of which required preliminary training, has proved to be only slightly less than might have been expected if he had had his pick of the trained construction workers of the country. Incidentally, much of this labor had not only to be trained, but fed before it could be used. The laborers on the Dam averaged, when they began, 25 per cent underweight. They were thin-bellied men, fed on corn pone and sow belly, not the husky construction workers to whom Mr. White was accustomed.

Yet decent diet and decent housing soon overcame this deficiency by at least one-half.

About a hundred of the workers on the Dam were brought over from the mining town of Wilder, Tennessee, after the bloody collapse of a strike in 1933, in which eighteen men lost their lives. These starving, locked-out union refugees from one of the worst industrial rat-holes in America are now rated among the most efficient workers on the Dam.

In Wilder, where the children are still singing ballads commemorating the union martyrs of the last strike, I heard stories that would sound incredible to the ears of people who live in communities where life is at least a little better. For example, does Norman Thomas know that when he spoke there during the strike, the only reason his meeting wasn't shot up was that the union men held the hills that day and trained a dozen high-powered rifles on the speakers' platform?

TVA gave those locked-out miners jobs. TVA raised both the wage scale and the conditions of labor. TVA, in the person of Chairman A. E. Morgan, stood for civil liberty and offered Socialist speakers a hall at Norris when the League for Industrial Democracy was run out of Knoxville. Largely because of the proximity of TVA, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers have been able to organize nearly 85 per cent of the clothing workers in the Knoxville area, while other unions have made equally notable progress.

Unquestionably it was the labor policies of TVA, scarcely less than its threat to the profits of power and

coal companies, that sharpened the bitterness of the opposition. This becomes apparent in the court record of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals, where TVA successfully appealed the adverse decision handed down by Judge Grubb in the Ashwander case. Hardier readers are urged to peruse this fascinating 1,200-page document, in which the genealogy of the TVA project is traced back as far as 1824, when President Monroe initiated the first of a series of unsuccessful attempts to build canals around Muscle Shoals. In it we find Chairman A. E. Morgan contending that "we are trying to find out how to take this wreckage of rugged individualism and make an orderly economy out of it."

To which the attorneys representing the private power interests that inspired the Ashwander suit reply: "The interpretation of the act as contended by the TVA would give it the full power of a business corporation acting within charter powers, to create 25 billion KWH annual primary capacity potential in these projects, and enter into, subsidize or promote any business whatever to find a market for this power; in short, unlimited power to dominate and reform the lives and destinies of the people of the area through domination of their industry."

In other words, the power interests object to TVA's exercising power from a social point of view which monopoly capitalism, with the strategic control lodged in the public utility holding companies, was exercising in the Tennessee Valley ruggedly and anti-socially before the birth of the President's love-child. Specifically, we find the power interests objecting to TVA's attempt to control land speculation of the Grand Coulee kind. On page 36 of the tran-

script the power interests contend that TVA's attempt to cut the price of overflow lands from $91.30 an acre to $29.67 per acre is an attempt "to overreach the owners of overflow lands" and hence, "contrary to good morals." Inferentially, the operations of real estate racketeers who unloaded Muscle Shoals lots on get-rich-quick suckers from coast to coast, were examples of "good morals."

On page 53 the "complainants aver that . . . the program of TVA is in substance and intent a long-range program." On page 66 they contend that "the use of federal funds for any such long-range purpose is a misuse of such funds." On page 75 we note that "TVA confuses and demoralizes the economic pattern"—as if that eroded, exploited, poverty-stricken region had been, prior to TVA, a rugged little paradise.

By this time it is apparent that the TVA is indeed a *wunderkind.* "It is a deliberate turning toward the future, a commitment to an ideal," orated Professor Rexford G. Tugwell. "Its success can depopulate cities, destroy a thousand entrenched privileges, invalidate a whole tradition of simple-hearted self-interest."

Compare this with the President's mild and carefully hedged commitment in the speech already quoted, and his embarrassment becomes understandable. Perhaps it is unfair to credit him with the paternity of the TVA baby.

What happened was that the original powers granted to the Tennessee Valley Authority, confirmed and somewhat extended by the last session of Congress, were such as to make conceivable, at least, a genuine enterprise of planning, in so far as planning is possible within the limitations of the capitalist economy.

The governing triumvirate—Arthur E. Morgan, David Lilienthal, and Harcourt Morgan—happened to be honest and able people. They assembled an exceptionally able staff and attempted in all earnestness to find "a way out of industrial chaos into a designed social and industrial order." They appealed "to the electrical industry . . . to show statesmanship" so that "this unplanned and unregulated condition should give place to an economic program based on foresight and planning, with clear recognition of the right of all well-meaning persons for a chance to work out their lives without exploitation or unnecessary obstacle."

They appealed in vain, of course. The nature of the thing they appealed to becomes painfully apparent in the court record. Business, particularly monopoly capitalism as represented by the private power interests directly affected, is a one-eyed acquisitive animal whose vision, like that of a locomotive headlight, covers a narrow strip of territory directly in front of it.

All across the continent I had seen how the withering glare of that headlight had stripped the forests, gutted and wasted the mineral resources, piled speculation on speculation and left in its wake a chaos of eroded and burned-over landscapes, ghost towns, and economic, social and moral collapse. Here in the Tennessee Valley this one-eyed animal had encountered the child of the President's day dream of "planning." For a moment it paused in consternation; then it gathered steam and proceeded to grind this perverse idealistic creature under the wheels of business necessity, which is not the necessity of order, of planning, but the necessity of profit. It appealed over the

heads of the President and Congress to the law, to the Constitution. It pointed out that "the United States is a government of enumerated powers, conferred in express terms or by necessary implication in it by the Constitution."

What this one-eyed animal really thinks and feels becomes again and again implicit in the statement of its case against TVA. It represents the governing class. It considers government to be an instrument for the achievement of its ends, which are private profit. It enjoys special privileges, but admits no entailed responsibilities. Yes, government limits the freedom of those governed—those not included in the governing class. The governing class, the property-owning, privilege-holding class, is exempt from these limitations.

This, in effect, will be the thesis which the power interests will defend in the final appeal of the Ashwander case to the Supreme Court.

Harcourt Morgan is not a business man, but a man of science, in fact one of the ablest men in his field. In a socialized America he would almost inevitably be a member of the central planning commission, not because he has socialistic views—if he holds such views he has not, so far as I know, expressed them—but because his whole life has been devoted to planning, and he has accomplished a good deal, in spite of the limitations of the social order in which he is bound.

Dr. Morgan is the erosion expert of the TVA triumvirate. What he is doing, he insisted, is nothing new and revolutionary in the political sense of the word. It started

as far back as 1862, when, in the middle of the Civil War, Governor Morrell put through Congress the Land Grant College Act, which laid the foundation of our whole system of agricultural colleges, agricultural experiment stations, Federal and State agricultural departments, and county agricultural agents, with their complex interrelations.

"What Morrell saw," said Dr. Morgan, "was that the soil of the South was being mined for cotton; that the dominance of the production, fabrication and exportation of cotton in the national economy, coupled with the methods of agriculture then employed, entailed a progressive destruction of the physiographic base; a fatal violation of the plant, animal, and human life without which no country can support its population. Morrell saw the danger of erosion, which if not checked must ultimately make of America another China. He saw most of the problems and envisaged some of the solutions. But best of all, he gave us, in the land grant colleges, and the long succession of research men and field workers which they have turned out, the means by which we in America, if we act in time, may yet avert the destruction of our natural heritage."

One of the problems was the introduction of cattle into the South. That entailed the conquest of the cattle tick. On this problem Harcourt Morgan and his associates spent many years, studying the life cycle of the tick and finally hitting upon the method of extermination, which, as disseminated by the land grant colleges and the county agents, has moved the cattle quarantine line from Mason and Dixon's line to the Rio Grande, and stopped annual losses of hundreds of millions.

But this was only the beginning of the attack on the fundamental problem of erosion. As animal husbandry was restored in the South, the cattle not only helped to refertilize the soil, but could be fed cover crops of legumes, alfalfa, vetches, which served the dual purpose of providing a vegetable cover for the soil, thus reducing erosion, and of extracting nitrogen from the air and returning it to the soil. That made every farm a nitrogen plant, with a combined production vastly exceeding that of the government nitrate plant at Muscle Shoals.

TVA, in fulfilling the terms of its mandate, is maintaining the nitrate plant in a stand-by condition for war emergencies. But because of the greatly cheapened commercial production of nitrates, nitrogen is no longer the chief deficiency in the agricultural economy. It is phosphates, necessary to produce plant fiber, and ultimately animal and human bones.

That is why the TVA research staff at Muscle Shoals is concentrating on the problem of producing cheaper phosphates. There are rich phosphate beds in the Tennessee Valley, in New Mexico, and elsewhere. But the requirement is to devise a process that will make the abundant low-grade ores available; also to produce higher concentrates.

With this objective TVA has set up two electric furnaces and two blast furnaces, using dump power from Muscle Shoals. Already some impressive results have been obtained; a 52 per cent concentrate, perhaps the highest yet achieved; also phosphate and lime combinations, which are tried out through the coöperation of the county

agents and the farmers themselves, on the erosion-impoverished farms of the Valley.

"TVA is not just a yardstick for the production and distribution of electricity," declared Mr. Morgan. "Navigation, flood control, the checking of erosion, the restoration of the soil fertility, the generation of power—they are all integral parts of what happens to be a magnificent natural laboratory for the study and solution of crucial problems. These problems are national, not regional. What we are doing here is done for the country as a whole. And upon the successful completion of this work, more may depend than even we who are engaged in it can at present imagine."

This is scarcely the language or the vision of the one-eyed capitalist acquisitor. What Dr. Morgan envisages is, of course, a long-range program. Business neither would nor could undertake such a program, crucial though it certainly is. Nor can business accept the solutions of the problems on which Dr. Morgan is engaged, for they are bound to be social solutions, not capitalist-acquisitive solutions.

It seems probable that TVA's major achievement will be to demonstrate that capitalism cannot plan. But it will also demonstrate both the possibilities of planning and the necessity of planning. It is therefore exactly what the power interests suppose it to be: a definite threat to the whole theory and practice of planless acquisition under capitalism. So that in contemplating this love-child one is obliged to acknowledge that the President has had his moments, even if he didn't really mean them.

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WHAT TIME IS IT?

Joshua saw the wheel
  Way in the middle of the air;
The little wheel run by faith,
The big wheel run by the will of God.
  Wheel in a wheel,
The little wheel run by faith,
The big wheel run by the will of God,
  Way in the middle of the air.

When I drove through the Yazoo Delta I heard the negroes singing this spiritual. They sat beside the creeks and roadside ditches, fished, and sang.

What time do they think it is in America—they who have never shared the American dream of Where Life is Better, they who have lived for nearly two centuries in the bleak darkness of economic and spiritual subjection?

Several times I stopped along the road and attempted to ask them. But they didn't know, and if they had, they wouldn't have told me anything—they are rightly suspicious of white men.

I suspect that no one knows. Certainly I am in no position to make any categorical pronouncements. America is huge—in seven months of travel I had seen only a fraction of it, and that too hurriedly.

Is America facing the barricades as the professional pur-

veyors of red scares like to declaim? If the barricades be taken as the symbol of civil war, the answer is no, not in any future that can at present be envisaged. Our domestic situation is that of a progressively deteriorating social and economic anarchy, with a definite drift toward fascism. Civil war can scarcely occur until the present recovery movement, based on government spending, has dissipated itself, until the post-dated checks which President Roosevelt has issued against the crisis come due, until our various regional vigilante and quasi-fascist groups become merged and coördinated under the aegis of big business.

It is possible that the pressure of the unemployed and of militant rank and file labor movements will be just strong enough to organize the reaction but not strong enough to stage an effective battle on either the economic or political front. To recognize this possibility implies no attitude of defeatism or impotence. There are other possibilities, but they can only be achieved by realistic struggle. There is the possibility that, after the clear demonstration that capitalism cannot plan, cannot release the forces of production, cannot finance consumption, there will come a fundamental change in our social psychology. At some point—just where and when I don't know—the American dream of freedom, of opportunity, of democracy, of justice as things actual or possible within the framework of the capitalist economy, will be definitely discarded by the masses of the industrial and agricultural workers. The break, I suspect, will come rather suddenly when it comes, and the factors making for such a break are steadily accumulating.

For one thing, the dream-making apparatus, while still

substantially intact, is being progressively deflated during the present period of capitalist decline. Being operated for profit, this apparatus cannot function with respect to our large and apparently permanent category of "extra-economic" men and women. It has long been true that the very poor have no press. Being primarily advertising businesses, our newspapers and magazines must concentrate on those who have money to buy something except bare necessities. The movies, too, must "trade up," permitting the underlying population to dream their own dreams without benefit of Hollywood. Even the radio does not penetrate effectively into these darker strata. The share-croppers and agricultural laborers of the south and southwest can't afford radios; this is also true of the unemployed and semi-employed in the urban slums.

On the other hand, no counter-apparatus has been erected. We don't have even an equivalent for the old "Appeal to Reason," with its half million circulation. Our radicals and revolutionaries—and this goes for all parties and factions—have not yet geared themselves effectively to the task of enlightening and moving the American masses.

Yet there are hopeful signs too: the current civil war in the American Federation of Labor, with the odds ultimately in favor of a conversion to industrial unionism and a consequent strengthening of labor militancy; the growth since the depression of the coöperative movement which now has 1,600,000 affiliated members and over a score of publications; the development of consumer coöperation, until recently chiefly a rural phenomenon in America, as an arm of the labor movement. Such a development is

possibly foreshadowed by the forthright pro-labor program of such organizations as Coöperative Distributors.

Meanwhile we face, in an unpredictable time perspective, the menace of war. Many informed observers believe that a three, or at most, a five year postponement of the European debacle is the best that can be hoped for.

Moscow, in pursuing its basic Socialism-in-one-country policy, is busy trying to underwrite the European status quo both through the League of Nations and through its control of the Communist sections in all the countries involved—the French Front Populaire being the frankest and most effective instrument of this policy.

America leans at the moment toward isolation. It was an unmistakable popular ground swell that forced through the neutrality resolution, against the will of the President and the State Department. Both desired a permissive enactment enabling them to play the dangerous game of defining the aggressor and employing sanctions to underwrite the status quo. The President's later action in extending the scope of the neutrality resolution may be taken to mean that he felt and responded to the popular demand for an isolationist policy; Mr. Roosevelt may be a navalist, but he is certainly a politician, first and foremost.

However, it seems clear that neutrality resolutions, however extended and implemented, can be only a stop gap. The European status quo is bound to be shaken, no matter what bargain Britain and France strike with Mussolini. The next war, wherever and however it is ultimately launched (not until Germany is ready to attack), seems certain to involve Russia, Japan, and Great Britain in the Far East. With America still capitalist and possibly in the

grip of a renewed crisis, we shall be exhorted to help Great Britain and Russia rescue China, or rather American imperialist interests in China, from Japanese imperialism. As already pointed out, it will be easy to recruit our unemployed for such a war.

Wheel in a wheel. To travel over America is to see these wheels grinding faster and faster; to know that they cannot be reversed or stopped; to be shaken and terrified again and again by contemplating what their grist may be. Certainly in the days to come, there can be no escape, no peace, no neutrality for anybody.

Life can be made better in America. Indeed, America can be made quite magnificent. But not by those who dream dead dreams, who plead exemption from struggle on one ground or another, who cry for peace but will not pay its price. . . .

How childish are all such pleas! Only when we have ceased to make them can we claim that as a people we have come of age and are worthy to challenge fate.

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